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Varied Thrush, Papay Westray, Orkney, 28 October 2021.
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Scottish Birds is the quarterly journal for SOC members, and is published in March, June, September and December annually.

Containing original papers relating to ornithology in Scotland, topical articles, bird observations, reports of rare and scarce bird sightings, alongside branch and Club-related news, our members tell us that *Scottish Birds* is one of the key benefits of belonging to the SOC. Its different sections have been developed to meet the wide needs of the birdwatching community, and the publication is renowned for its first-class photography.

An archive of the journal is available on the SOC website, where links can be found to other Club publications including the *Online Scottish Bird Report.*

More about the SOC...

On the one hand, a birdwatching club. Established in 1936, the Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) is Scotland's bird club with 15 branches around the country and a growing membership of over 3,000. Through a programme of talks, outings, conferences and other events, it brings together like-minded individuals with a passion for birds, nature and conservation.

On the other, a network of volunteers across Scotland, gathering vital, impartial information about our wild birds. The data we collect is made available to conservationists, planners and developers, and is used by organisations such as the RSPB, as one of the first points of reference in informed conservation planning.

Club Headquarters can be found at Waterston House, Aberlady, overlooking the scenic local nature reserve. Housed within, is the George Waterston Library, the largest ornithological library in Scotland, and the Donald Watson Gallery - one of the jewels in the Waterston House crown, exhibiting wildlife art all year-round.

Join us...

As well as receiving *Scottish Birds* every quarter, SOC members have access to a programme of talks and outings across Scotland and affiliation to a local branch of the Club. New members choosing to pay their subscription by direct debit are eligible to a free thank you gift.

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For more information about the Club and its activities, including details of how to join, please visit www.the-soc.org.uk or contact Waterston House on 01875 871 330, or email membership@the-soc.org.uk

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First words

I am so pleased and proud to have been invited to take my turn as President of the SOC. I have huge respect for the Club, which punches well above its weight and which, in promoting the enjoyment, study and recording of birds, represents interests so close to my own. It's a delight for me to concentrate my efforts on supporting the Club, its staff and its members as chair of its Council. I look forward to ensuring we offer members the best experience and continue the SOC's major role in gathering and promulgating data and information about Scotland's birds. With the breeding season in full swing and long hours of daylight available for us to watch and record birds, what's not to enjoy?!

Plate 74. Ruth Briggs, Waterston House, April 2022. © *Doreen Main*

Until now, my involvement with the SOC has been that of an ordinary member. I've particularly valued *Scottish Birds* for its spread of features and professional quality, and I've attended various conferences and events. I happen to live conveniently near Aberlady so I've regularly enjoyed the exhibitions at Waterston House. I'm rarely out without my binoculars.

My professional background has been a career mainly with British public sector nature conservation and natural heritage bodies, latterly at senior management level. A decade as Area Manager in the Northern Isles ensured life-long personal attachment especially to Shetland and people there. And to tirricks, bonxies and tysties! Subsequent work in south-east Scotland gave me ample opportunity to engage in wider organisational management and leadership, interests which I then continued to pursue in support of a range of other environmental bodies. My ambition for and with SOC is to further enhance the professionalism, knowledge and experience it encompasses for the benefit of its increasing membership and the wider community, to recognise that this is largely achieved through the commitment and activities of (us) members, and to maintain or strengthen the Club's position as one of the key wildlife societies in the whole of Scotland.

I am open to all feedback and suggestions from members - keep me right in these early weeks of my new position, give me ideas of your ornithological priorities relevant to the Club's remit and Constitution (see website for that), tell me what you want from your membership. In due course, Council, supported by its sub-committees and working groups, will consider future strategy and priorities (the same or different) so all input is relevant and valued.

Lastly, I'd like to acknowledge Ian Bainbridge's work as President before me; he continues to support and advise us. I also want to recognise the work and enthusiasm of our branches and their committees, both in running member events and in carrying out important local projects. The Local Bird Recorders and Local Bird Report groups too work very hard to compile and condense masses of data; and photographers give us much pleasure, and much to admire, in our publications and social media channels.

Next time, more about the Club's role in Scottish ornithology. It's something that any and all of us out and submitting even occasional records (for example, to BirdTrack) are part of. Have a good summer season!

Ruth Briggs, SOC President

Scottish Birds Records Committee report on rare birds in Scotland, 2020

C.J. McINERNY & R.Y. McGOWAN
on behalf of the Scottish Birds Records Committee

This is the 13th annual report of the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC) describing rare birds recorded in Scotland during 2020. Details of previous annual reports that cover the period 2005 to 2019 can be found listed in McInerny & McGowan (2021), some of which are cited in this report.

A summary of the rare bird species considered by SBRC, the SBRC List, and other committees is given in **Appendix 2** and is shown at www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/sbrc-list-past-lists

Changes to the SBRC List from 1 January 2020 are as follows: Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis*, Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*, Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*, Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*, Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni* and Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla* are removed from the List. Records for Lesser Scaup and Kentish Plover are now considered by the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC) and the four other species assessed by local Scottish committees. From March 2022, SBRC will no longer consider records of Scottish Crossbill *Loxia scotica* (Lewis & McInerny 2022a, 2022b, www.the-soc.org.uk/content/bird-recording/sbrc/identification-of-scottish-and-parrot-crossbills). For a summary of these changes see **Appendix 2** and www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/sbrc-list-past-lists

The distribution and number of most rare birds seen in Scotland during 2020 was similar to other years. However, two raptor species were seen after a break of a few years: two Montagu's Harriers *Circus pygargus* were noted, the first since 2017; and two Red-footed Falcons *Falco vespertinus* were reported after a longer gap of five years, the last being in 2015. Higher numbers of the large shearwaters were observed with nine Cory's Shearwaters *Calonectris borealis* and 13 Great Shearwaters *Ardenna gravis*. Furthermore, the highest or equal highest annual totals were recorded for a number of species: five Cattle Egrets *Bubulcus ibis*, an exceptional two Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers *Dendrocopos minor* (the second and third national records), 10 Woodchat Shrikes *Lanius senator*, 11 Radde's Warblers *Phylloscopus schwarzi*, 15 Citrine Wagtails *Motacilla citreola*, and two Serins *Serinus serinus*.

In contrast, a number of SBRC species were not seen in Scotland during 2020 including Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba*, Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*, Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans*, Night-heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*, Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*, and Black Kite *Milvus migrans*.

Format of the report

The species accounts in the report follow a standard format. Nomenclature and taxonomic sequence follow the latest version of the *Scottish List*, which follows the 9th Edition of the British List and subsequent changes adopted by the British Ornithologists' Union (BOU 2022, Forrester *et al.* 2021; www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/the-scottish-list).

On the header line, after the species or subspecies name, are three numbers:

- Total number of birds in Scotland to the end of 2004, based on Forrester *et al.* (2007) with adjustments in a few cases, and also including records added in this report. In some cases older records, 'At Sea' records, or records pertaining to the breeding population are explicitly excluded from the totals, following the example of Forrester *et al.* (2007). In the case of Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana* numbers seen in the past were so great that totals have not been estimated.
- Total number of birds in Scotland during the period since 2004 but excluding the current year.
- Where appropriate, acceptances by BBRC and by local committees are included. Returning birds or repeat sightings of the same individual, insofar as these can be judged, are not counted and so are not added to totals.
- Total number in the current year (2020).

Occasionally, adjustments to totals have been made to take account of late retrospective acceptances by local committees, or when corrections are detected from Excel spreadsheet totals, which are displayed here www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/sbrc-species-analysis

Immediately below the header line is a table of accepted Scottish records for 2020, with details. For those species assessed locally in the Northern Isles (Shetland, Fair Isle and Orkney), full details of accepted Northern Isles records are not given. Instead, they are summarised as a separate table or in the text.

For all taxa, information is also provided about pre-2020 records that were not included in previous reports. These are presented in reverse chronological order. Records assessed by SBRC are listed in full, otherwise only summary information is provided.

It should be noted that records of individual birds reappearing at the same location in subsequent years can be accepted by Local Recorders without submission to SBRC; full details of these returning birds are nonetheless provided in this report for completeness. Revised and/or corrected details are also provided for some pre-2019 records, published previously.

For each record listed in full the following information is provided:

- Year.
- Recording area. www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/local-recorders-network
- Location(s). In the case of some recording areas, individual islands or component administrative areas are also named.
- Number of birds if more than one, with age and/or gender if known.
- 'Returning' if applicable.
- Date(s). Note that the use of a date range does not necessarily imply that a bird was confirmed to be present at the location or observed throughout; in some cases, it may have been observed only on the first and last dates and may even have moved elsewhere.
- 'Found dead' or 'died' if applicable.
- 'Trapped' if applicable.
- Use of DNA analysis to aid identification.
- Existence of a photograph, video or audio recording, if this formed part of the assessment process.
- Names of observers, in alphabetical order. Every effort has been made to name only those people who played a part in finding and/or identifying the bird. However, if no submission was made by these observers, the submitter of the record is also credited: if the submitter was the Local Recorder this is shown as '*per* Local Recorder'. All other observers are covered by the use of '*et al.*'.
- Details and location of specimen if preserved in a museum, with specimen accession number if available.
- Additional sightings of the same bird at a different location, or a cross-reference to additional sightings in a different recording area or year. Where a bird is said to be the same, this is usually a presumption based on the judgment of the observer, Local Recorder and/or SBRC.

The table of records is followed by the main text of the species account. At the end of each account, a brief summary of global breeding and wintering distribution, with mention of relevant subspecies to Scotland, is given in parentheses.

Species coverage

A list of records assessed by SBRC and considered to be 'not proven' can be found in **Appendix 1**. **Appendix 2** summarises the involvement of different committees in the assessment of the taxa on the SBRC List each year for the period 2017–21. **Appendix 3** lists corrections to the SBRC Excel spreadsheets.

SBRC

SBRC was set up in 1984 as a subcommittee of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) Council. Its role is to assess records of species that are rare in Scotland but not rare enough in Britain to be assessed by BBRC. Current members are Mark Lewis (Chairman from November 2021), Jim Dickson, Rob Fray, Dave Pullan, Chris Rodger (from November 2021), David Steel and Mark Warren. Chris McInerny is non-voting Secretary and Bob McGowan is non-voting Museum Consultant. Mark Wilkinson was Chairman up to November 2021. For more information about SBRC see www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/about-sbrc

Records accepted by SBRC are announced on the SOC website as soon as they are processed at www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/recent-decisions, and thereafter formally published in annual reports, such as this, in the June issue of *Scottish Birds*.

When published, the accepted record details are also added to Excel spreadsheets which list all records for SBRC species. These Excel spreadsheets display the data chronologically by recording areas, and graphically both by year from 1950 to 2020 and seasonally by 10-day periods. Examples of the graphs have been used in SBRC Reports published in *Scottish Birds*, with some in this report. The SBRC species Excel spreadsheets have been placed on the SOC website at www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/sbrc-species-analysis, where they can be downloaded; they are updated once a year following publication of the SBRC Report. The SBRC and SOC encourage interested parties to use these SBRC species Excel files which are a convenient way to analyse and interrogate SBRC data, but we ask that SBRC Reports published in *Scottish Birds*, such as this, are cited as a way to acknowledge SBRC as the source of the data.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost we are grateful to all observers who submitted records of Scottish rarities to Local Recorders and SBRC during the period. Without their efforts to find and record these birds the report would not exist. We owe a particular debt of gratitude to those who gave permission for their excellent photographs to be reproduced here.

We thank the following Local Recorders for their assistance in compiling, checking and correcting records for this report: Yvonne Benting, Ian Broadbent, Paul Collin, Jon Cook, Jim Dickson, Iain English, Rob Fray, Russell Neave, David Parnaby, John Poyner, Fraser Simpson, Graham Sparshott, Stephen Welch, and Val Wilson. We are particularly grateful for the co-operation of the Northern Isles recorders Rob Fray (Shetland, Fair Isle) and Ian Andrews (Fair Isle) and Russell Neave (Orkney) in helping to compile summaries for species assessed locally within their areas included in this report. We very much appreciate the help of Stephen Hunter in managing the SBRC pages on the SOC website, uploading accepted SBRC records on the recent decisions page www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/recent-decisions and the SBRC species Excel spreadsheets www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/sbrc-species-analysis. We thank Mark Lewis, Keith Naylor and Mark Wilkinson for comments on the manuscript.

Systematic list of accepted records

Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*
29: 11: 2

Table 1. Accepted records of Stone-curlew in Scotland, 2020.

2020: **Argyll** Ardalanish Bay, Ross of Mull, Mull, 19 April, photo (N. Shannon).
Fair Isle Gilsetter & Chatham's Land, 26 May, photo (D. Parnaby *et al.*).

Stone-curlew is a very rare visitor to Scotland; there were just 40 observations to the end of 2019 with almost half of these in the Northern Isles, and the remainder scattered across the country mostly along the east coast. There is a peak in occurrence in late May and early June, although birds have been observed at all times of the year (McInerny & McGowan 2021).

The two 2020 records were typical dates for the species in Scotland. The Mull bird was just the second for Argyll, with the last on 23–24 May 1997 at Gruinard Flats, Islay (*Scottish Bird Report* 1997: 31).

(Nominate *B. o. oedicnemus* breeds in open habitats in southern Europe east to the Caucasus, extending as far north as England and Poland; migrates south to winter in Spain and North Africa. Five other subspecies.)

Plate 75. Stone-curlew, Ardalanish Bay, Ross of Mull, Mull, Argyll, 19 April 2020. © *Nigel Shannon*

White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*
69: 143: 1

Table 2. Accepted record of White-rumped Sandpiper in Scotland, 2020.

2020: **Outer Hebrides** Loch Ordais, Lewis, first-calendar-year, 29 September, photo (*per* Local Recorder).

White-rumped Sandpiper is a scarce but annual visitor to Scotland from North America, with most observations in late summer and autumn on the Outer Hebrides.

That just one was seen in Scotland during 2020 is surprising, considering that 49 were observed during 2019. It is fascinating how numbers of vagrants of a particular species can fluctuate between years. This likely reflects both appropriate weather patterns, which for this Nearctic shorebird is the prevalence of strong westerly winds across the Atlantic during the migration period, and breeding success, as many of the 2019 birds were first-calendar-year and so born that year.

(Breeds in North America at high latitudes, migrating to winter in Brazil, Argentina and Chile.)

Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*
34: 43: 4

Table 3. Accepted records of Lesser Yellowlegs in Scotland, 2020.

2020: **Ayrshire** Fail Loch, first-calendar-year, 12–13 September, photo (J. Rose *et al.*).
Outer Hebrides Paiblesgearraidh (Paiblesgarry), North Uist, first-calendar-year, 24 September, photo (P. Winn *et al.*).
Outer Hebrides Hogha Gearraidh, Baile Raghaill (Hougharry, Balranald), North Uist, first-calendar-year, 26 October, photo (*per* Local Recorder).
Outer Hebrides Àird a' Mhachair (Ardivachar), South Uist, first-calendar-year, 7–21 December, photo (M. Gillingham).

Lesser Yellowlegs is a rare visitor to Scotland from North America. The majority of birds are found in late summer and autumn, with smaller numbers in spring; and there are observations in about half of the recording

Plate 76. Lesser Yellowlegs, first-calendar-year, Paiblesgearraidh (Paiblesgarry), North Uist, Outer Hebrides, 24 September 2020. © *Pete Winn*

areas, though with almost 24% of records in the Outer Hebrides.

The four first-calendar-year birds observed during 2020 in the autumn are typical for this species in Scotland. The Ayrshire individual was the fourth for the recording area. The last blank year for Scotland was 2004.

(Breeds in North America at higher latitudes. Migrates to winter in southern USA, south through the Caribbean, Central and South America to Tierra del Fuego.)

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*
12: 30: 2

Table 4. Accepted records of Yellow-legged Gull in Scotland, 2020, and an additional record for 2019.

2020:	**Clyde** Balgray Reservoir, fourth-calendar-year/fifth-calendar-year, returning from 2019, 12 March, photo (J.J. Sweeney).
	Clyde Balgray Reservoir, adult, 3–22 February, photo (J.J. Sweeney).
	Dumfries & Galloway Loch Ryan, adult, 6 December, photo (B.D. Henderson).
2019:	**Clyde** Richmond Park, Shawfield, Glasgow, fourth-calendar-year/fifth-calendar-year, 23 December to 15 March 2020, photo (K. Hoey *et al.*).

Yellow-legged Gull is very rare in Scotland, although found throughout the country usually in groups of other large white-headed gulls, often Lesser Black-backed Gulls *Larus fuscus*. Birds have been found at all times of the year, sometimes remaining for extended periods, with a number of individuals returning to the same locations in consecutive years. However, the species is probably under-recorded, being challenging to identify, particularly immatures.

It seems likely that most if not all records of Yellow-legged Gulls in Scotland refer to the nominate subspecies *L. m. michahellis*, which has a Mediterranean and south-west European distribution including England (McInerny 2009). However, observers should be aware that one record in Scotland of Yellow-legged Gull of the subspecies *L. m. atlantis* from the Atlantic islands has been accepted by the British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee (BOURC) and BBRC as the first for Britain (Stoddart & McInerny 2017). All potential records of this subspecific taxon, which breeds on the Azores, Madeira and Canaries, should be sent to BBRC (**Appendix 2**).

(Nominate *michahellis* breeds mainly from south-west Europe east to the Black Sea, with immatures dispersing widely in winter as far north as Britain and the Baltic. *L. m. atlantis* breeds on the Azores, Madeira and Canaries, wandering south to north-west Africa.)

White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*
59: 25: 2

Table 5. Accepted records of White-winged Black Tern in Scotland, 2020.

2020: **Dumfries & Galloway** The Whig, Loch Ryan, first-calendar-year, 5–23 October, photo (E. & S. Grover, B.D. Henderson *et al.*).
Orkney Echna Loch, Burray, first-calendar-year, 31 August to 4 September, photo (I. Cunningham, P. Higson, A. Leitch *et al.*).

White-winged Black Tern is a rare visitor to Scotland, mostly observed along the east side of the country and on islands between late spring and late autumn.

The sighting at Loch Ryan was only the second for Dumfries & Galloway, the first being one at Carsethorn, Kirkbean in November 1997.

(Breeds in central and eastern Palearctic areas, migrating south to winter in Africa, Australasia and the Indian subcontinent.)

Plate 77. White-winged Black Tern, first-calendar-year, Whig Loch Ryan, Dumfries & Galloway, 5–23 October 2020. © *Stephen Grover*

Wilson's Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*
4: 2: 0

Table 6. Accepted records of Wilson's Petrel in Scotland, 2020.

2020: **At Sea** off St Kilda, 6 July, photo (P. Connaughton *et al. per* Local Recorder).
At Sea north-west of Shetland, 10 August, two, photo (P. Harris, P.V. Harvey, W.T.S. Miles *et al.*) (*Scottish Birds* 40: 366–369).

Wilson's Petrel is an extremely rare visitor to Scotland with just six records prior to 2020 (McInerny & McGowan 2021).

The idea that this species likely occurs in Scottish waters in mid to late summer well off-shore in the North Atlantic was tested and confirmed by Miles *et al.* (2020) who chartered a vessel from Shetland and successfully found two birds north-west of the archipelago. The bird off St Kilda was also observed and photographed from a boat. It seems for those who wish to add this species to their *Scottish List* a similar nautical adventure will be required.

The two records, of three birds, in 2020 are not added to the annual total in the header as both were recorded 'At Sea'.

(Oceanic. Three subspecies, nominate *O. o. oceanicus*, *O. o. exasperates* and *O. o. chilensis*, all widespread across the southern oceans where it is the world's most numerous seabird. Breeds on the Antarctic continent and offshore islands of South America. Trans-equatorial migrants occur in all oceans. The two subspecies *O. o. oceanicus* and *O. o. exasperates* are thought to migrate into the North Atlantic; although either could occur in Western Palearctic waters, Irish and Icelandic specimens have been identified as *O. o. exasperates*.)

Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris borealis*
c. 228: 33: 9

Table 7. Accepted records of Cory's Shearwater in Scotland, 2020.

2020: **Ayrshire** Saltcoats, 10 August (T. Byars).
Dumfries & Galloway Corsewall Point, 25 September (B.D. Henderson).
Highland Tarbat Ness, Ross & Cromarty, 13 August (D. Tanner).

Highland Tarbat Ness, Ross & Cromarty, 14 August (M. Shepherd).
Highland Tarbat Ness, Ross & Cromarty, 19 August (A.F. McNee).
Highland Brora, Sutherland, 25 August (D. MacAskill).
Isle of May 30 July (D. Steel).
Lothian Hound Point, 29 July, photo (M. Griffin *et al.*); **same** Fife, St David's, 29 July (J.S. Nadin *et al.*).
Lothian Hound Point, 9 August photo (M. Holling, C. McGuigan *et al.*); **same** Fife, St David's, 9 August (J.S. Nadin *et al.*) (*Scottish Birds* 40: 370–375).

Cory's Shearwater is a rare visitor to Scottish waters, recorded near-annually, with most seen off North Ronaldsay, Orkney and the Outer Hebrides during the late summer and early autumn. A few enter the North Sea where they are observed moving along the east coast. Although an increase in sightings from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s occurred, numbers since have decreased, with about two or less seen annually, and none were observed in 2010, 2012, 2015 and 2019.

Against this background, an exceptional nine birds were recorded during 2020, the highest annual count since 2006 when 10 were noted. Birds were seen off all coasts of the mainland, but it was interesting and unexplained that none were recorded from the Outer Hebrides, considering that eight Great Shearwaters were observed from these islands during 2020.

It is possible that some of the records seen along the east coast relate to the same birds; such repeat sightings of identifiable individual seabirds have occurred in the past. For example, the bird observed on 30 July from the Isle of May flying east and leaving the Firth of Forth might well have been the same as that seen the previous day from Hound Point (Lothian), but is listed here as a different bird.

The bird seen on the 9 August from Hound Point and St David's (Fife) at times was observed flying with the first Scottish record of Scopoli's Shearwater *C. diomedea,* which remained until 11 August (Nadin 2020). The identification of a Scopoli's Shearwater in Scottish waters was enabled as the bird flew close inshore allowing photographic images of the underwing; these revealed critical identification features which allowed it to be separated from the very closely related Cory's Shearwater (Nadin 2020). Most large shearwaters observed in Scotland are not seen as well as this bird, and so observers will not have noted the underwing detail. Therefore, SBRC has decided to take a pragmatic approach and accept such records as Cory's Shearwater as the default species, since birds seen in Scotland are most likely to be *C. borealis*.

(Breeds on the Azores, Canary Islands and other nearby Atlantic islands, with the closely related Scopoli's Shearwater *C. diomedea* breeding in the Mediterranean. Both species occur in North Atlantic waters in autumn and are on the British List, but most are assumed to be Cory's, with Scopoli's recorded in Scottish waters just once.)

Great Shearwater *Ardenna gravis*
c. 522 (1950–2004): 9,228: 13 (excluding 'At Sea' records)

Table 8. Accepted records of Great Shearwater in Scotland, 2020.

2020: Highland Tarbat Ness, Ross & Cromarty, 25 August, photo (P. Stronach).
Highland Strathy Point, Sutherland, two, 5 September (D. MacAskill).
Outer Hebrides Rubha Robhanais (Butt of Lewis), Lewis, 15 August, photo (*per* Local Recorder)
Outer Hebrides Ceann an t-Siumpain (Tiumpan Head), Lewis, 26 August (S. Dodd).
Outer Hebrides Rubha Àird a' Mhuile (Rubha Ardvule), South Uist, 3 September, photo (P. Stronach).
Outer Hebrides Rubha Robhanais (Butt of Lewis), Lewis, four, 5 September (P. Stronach).
Outer Hebrides Rubha Robhanais (Butt of Lewis), Lewis, 5 September, photo (P. Stronach *per* Local Recorder).
Orkney Rora Head, Hoy, 9 September (T. Wells).
Orkney Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, 10 September, photo (G. Gay, D. Shepherd *et al.*).

Great Shearwater was rarely seen in Scotland until many were observed during 2005–07, with a highest annual count a staggering 8,935 recorded in 2007. Since then, however, no more than six have been recorded in any one year, if 'At Sea' records are discounted; none were seen in 2010, 2012, 2016 and 2019. This underlines the exceptional nature of the influxes witnessed during 2005–07.

Plate 78. Great Shearwater, Tarbat Ness, Ross & Cromarty, Highland, 25 August 2020. © *Peter Stronach*

(Breeds on South Atlantic islands and carries out a clockwise loop migration in the North Atlantic outside the breeding season. In the north-east Atlantic occurs most regularly off the south-west coast of Ireland in late summer and autumn.)

The species is a late summer and autumn visitor, with most sightings from North Ronaldsay, Orkney, and a few from the Outer Hebrides and along the east coast of mainland Scotland.

The thirteen seen in 2020 was the highest annual count since the huge influx of 2007. Great Shearwater remains a difficult species to see in Scotland, so it is remarkable that one observer saw seven in 2020, including birds from the Outer Hebrides and Highland. The bird seen from Tarbat Ness, Ross & Cromarty, by this observer on 25 August flew past during a powerful north-easterly storm which resulted in it coming close to land and permitting photography (plate 78), a rare event for the species in Scotland. Exceptional numbers of other pelagic seabirds were seen elsewhere along the east coast of Scotland on this day because of the storm, including many Long-tailed Skuas *Stercorarius longicaudus* (McInerny & Hoey 2021).

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*
3: 21: 5

Table 9. Accepted records of Cattle Egret in Scotland, 2020, and an additional record for 2012.

2020:	**Argyll** Dalvore, Mòine Mhòr, 22 October, photo (D.C. Jardine, J. McLellan).
	Clyde Carbarns Pool, Motherwell, 25 October, photo (D. Abraham *et al.*).
	Dumfries & Galloway Caerlaverock WWT, 9 August, photo (S. Cooper *et al.*).
	Dumfries & Galloway Lantonside Farm, Caerlaverock, 3 September, photo (B. & R. Mearns).
	North-East Scotland Loch of Strathbeg, Starnafin Farm, 3–5 September, photo (K. & R. Barnes *et al. per* Local Recorder) (*Scottish Birds* 41: 77); same **North-East Scotland** Loch of Strathbeg, 12–13 November photo (A. Johnston, G. Ruthven).
2012:	**Outer Hebrides** Loch Dubh Mhic Guaidhre, near Baile Raghaill (Balranald), North Uist, 26 September to 4 October, photo (*per* Local Recorder).

Cattle Egret is very rare in Scotland although since 2007 increasingly more are being found, with birds seen every year since 2013 (Figure 1).

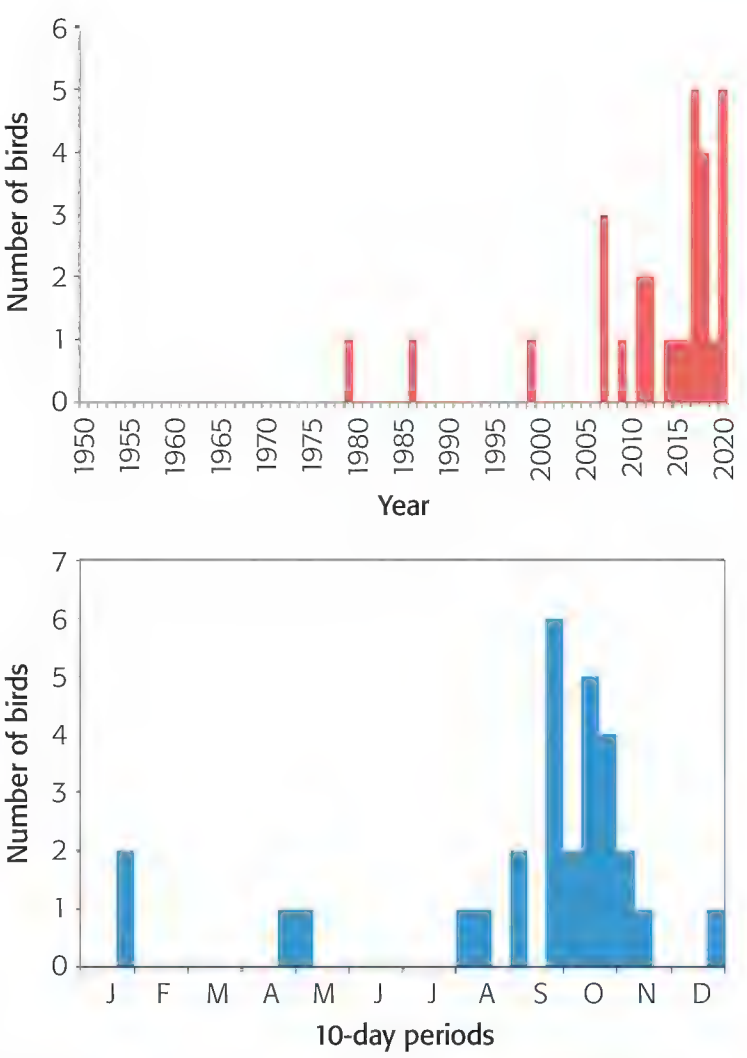

Figure 1. Annual and seasonal occurrence of Cattle Egret in Scotland by 10-day periods, 1950–2020.

This follows the large increase in numbers present in England, where over 200 appeared in 2007, with the species first breeding in 2008; a second influx occurred in 2016 resulting in further breeding and flocks of 51 and 87 observed in Devon and Somerset during 2018 (McInerny & McGowan 2019).

Observations of this species continue to increase in Scotland, with the five in 2020 the equal highest annual count (Figure 1). The bird at Loch of Strathbeg was the first for North-East Scotland (Barnes & Barnes 2021).

(Occurs widely in sub-tropical and temperate areas throughout the world, the European population being centred on the Mediterranean, extending north to central and western France, with increasing numbers of records farther north. Largely a short-distance migrant.)

Plate 79. Montagu's Harrier, female, second-calendar-year or older, Newmains Farm, Reston Borders, 14 May 2020. © *David Graham*

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*
45: 6: 2 (excluding young from known Scottish nests)

Table 10. Accepted records of Montagu's Harrier in Scotland, 2020.

2020:	**Borders** Newmains Farm, Reston, second-calendar-year or older, female, 14 May (D. Graham). **Upper Forth** Thornhill, adult, male, 28 May (D. Rees).

Montagu's Harrier is a very rare migrant to Scotland, with the few records mostly in spring along the east side of the country from Borders to Shetland. A few breeding attempts have been successful, though none since 1955, and the total of 53 birds to the end of 2020 excludes fledged young from these breeding attempts.

The two birds seen in 2020 were the first in Scotland since 2017. Both were brief 'fly-bys' seen by single observers, but were observed

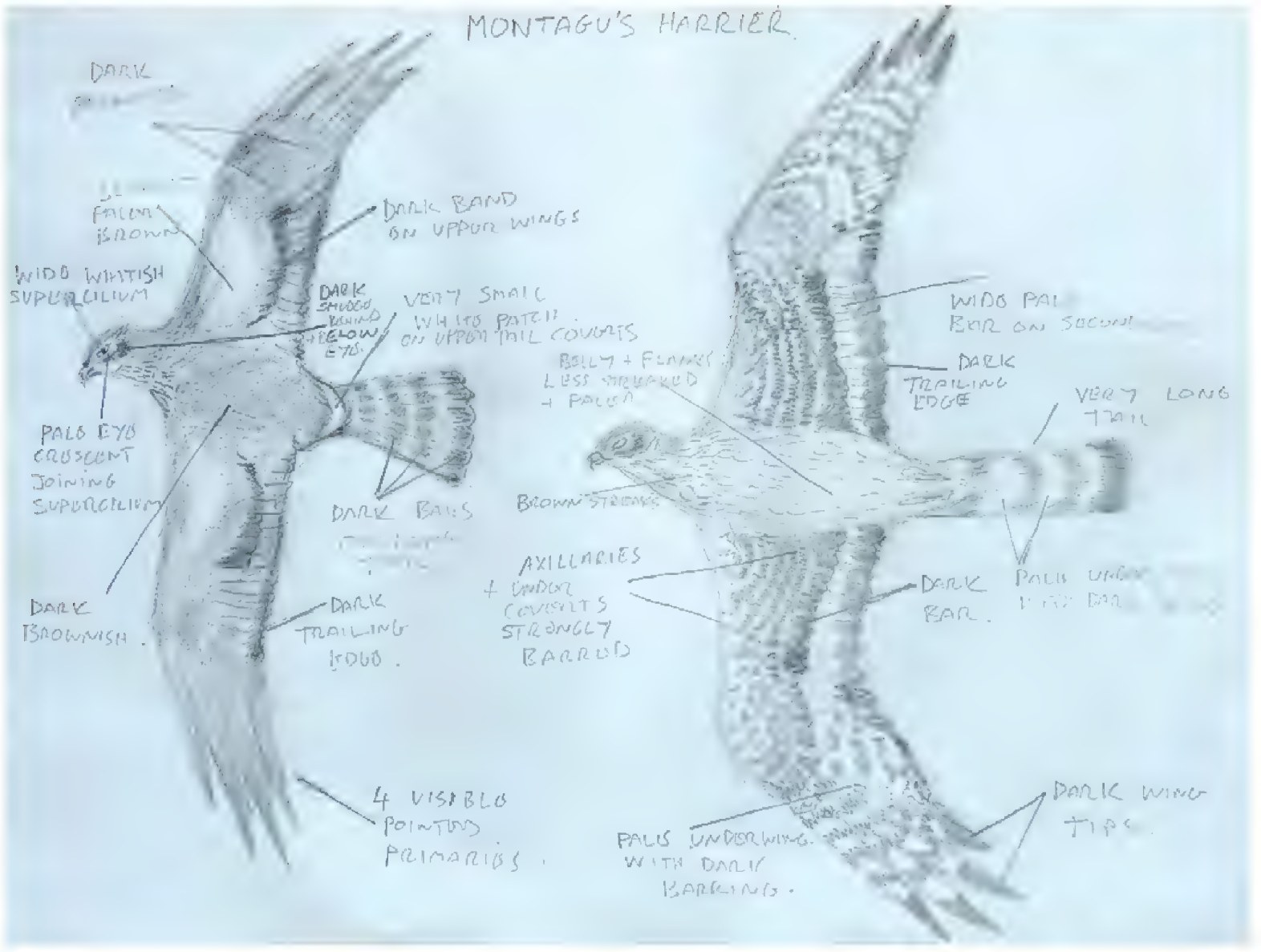

Plate 80. Montagu's Harrier, male, adult, Thornhill, Upper Forth, 28 May 2020. © *Darren Rees*

well enough to establish identification and allow field sketches to be drawn that were submitted with the descriptions to SBRC (plates 79 and 80). The Upper Forth bird was the first in the recording area since the breeding pair at Cromlix Moor in 1955 (Forrester *et al.* 2007), a gap of 65 years.

(Breeds from North Africa, Iberia, England and Sweden across continental Europe and central Asia to Yenisei River; winters in African savannas and on the Indian subcontinent.)

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*
19: 37: 0

Table 11. Accepted record of Black Kite in Scotland, 2008.

2008:	**Angus & Dundee** Ballindarg, near Padanaram, 12 April, photo (S. Green, C. McGuigan *et al.*).

Black Kite is a very rare visitor to Scotland from continental Europe. Most have been seen in spring, from April to June, with far fewer sightings in summer and autumn. There have also been instances of summering, and a single case of hybridization with Red Kite *Milvus milvus*.

Occurrences have increased in recent years; there were 37 during 2007–20 (annual mean 2.6) following just nine in the period 1997–2006 (annual mean 0.9).

No Black Kites were observed during 2020 in Scotland, but we note here a recently submitted and accepted record of an individual from 2008. This becomes the first observation of the species for Angus & Dundee, predating the only other record from 2012 (McGowan *et al.* 2014).

(Nominate *migrans* breeds throughout most of Europe except the far north; winters in sub-Saharan Africa. Other subspecies elsewhere in the Old World.)

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*
0: 1: 2

Table 12. Accepted records of Lesser Spotted Woodpecker in Scotland, 2020.

2020:	**Shetland** Cauldhame, Trondra, Mainland, male, 5 October (P. Bristow, G. Stamp). **Shetland** Upper Kergord, Mainland, 9 October (A.J.H. Harrop).

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker is an extremely rare bird in Scotland, with just one record, on Shetland in October 2012.

The two Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers seen during 2020 in Shetland were exceptional, being just the second and third national records. Both were seen briefly, with no photographic images obtained, but were most probably different birds as one was established as a male, while the other was not seen well enough to be sexed with certainty.

It seems most likely that the three birds seen in Shetland did not derive from the highly sedentary and declining British population (*D. m. comminutus*), but instead originated from northern continental Europe. If so, they would be of the nominate subspecies *D. m. minor*, which would be the first occurrence for Scotland and Britain. However, subspecific identification of this woodpecker necessitates biometrics of a trapped bird or a corpse from one such vagrant.

(Ten or 11 subspecies. Breeds across the Palearctic region from England and Wales to Japan. Northern populations are short distance migrants, with those farther south being sedentary.)

Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*
83: 19: 3

Table 13. Accepted records of Red-footed Falcon in Scotland, 2020, and an additional record for 2012.

2020: **Moray & Nairn** Dorenell wind farm, second-calendar-year, female, 4 June, photo (M. Johnston).
North-East Scotland Ballater, second-calendar-year or older, female, 8 June, photo (G. Rose).
Orkney near Hundland, Papa Westray, second-calendar-year or older, female, 30 May, photo (D. Roche *et al.*).
2012: **Angus & Dundee** Kinpurney Hill, Newtyle, second-calendar-year or older, female, 11 June, photo (N.L. Tijssen *per* Local Recorder).

Red-footed Falcon is a rare late spring migrant to Scotland, with most sightings coming from Shetland, Orkney and North-East Scotland, with others mainly along the east coast.

The two in 2020 were the first seen in Scotland since 2015, a surprisingly long interval for this species. The Moray & Nairn bird, and the recently submitted and accepted Angus & Dundee bird from 2012, were each first records for their recording areas.

(Breeds from Hungary and the Czech Republic east to China, wintering in southern Africa.)

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*
86: 32: 10

Table 14. Accepted records of Woodchat Shrike in Scotland, 2020.

2020: **Orkney** North Hill, Papa Westray, 30 May, photo (D. Roche *et al.*).
Orkney The Shunan, Harray, Mainland, male, 7–11 June, photo (A. Forsyth *et al.*).
Outer Hebrides Aisgeirnis (Askernish), South Uist, male, 28–30 May, photo (B. Neill *per* Local Recorder *et al.*).
Outer Hebrides Bragar, Lewis, first-calendar-year, 2–3 October (R.D. Wemyss *et al.*).
Shetland Grutness, Mainland, adult, male, 7 May, photo (A.H.J. Harrop *et al.*)
Shetland Out Skerries, 1 June, photo (J. Turner *per* S. Dunstan).
Shetland Windhouse, Yell, first-calendar-year, 8–23 September, photo (A. Kettle *et al.*).
Shetland Levenwick, Mainland, first-calendar-year, 16–18 September, photo (W.T.S. Miles *et al.*).
Shetland Ham, Foula, first-calendar-year, 20–29 September, photo (D. & G. Atherton *per* Local Recorder).
Shetland Virkie, Mainland, first-calendar-year, 26–27 September, photo (R.M. Fray, P.V. Harvey *et al.*).

Woodchat Shrike is a rare, but now annual since 2011, passage migrant to Scotland, with most in the Northern Isles. Adults and sub-adults are seen in spring as overshoots from their European continental breeding areas, with dispersing juveniles recorded in autumn (Figure 2).

The 12 birds seen in 2020 was the highest ever annual count for this species in Scotland. Some spring birds can be surprisingly difficult to age and sex without detailed images of the open wing; observers should attempt to obtain these to add to their submitted description.

(Nominate *L. s. senator* breeds from north-west Africa, Iberia, France and Belgium south to Turkey; *L. s. badius* on Mediterranean islands; and another subspecies from Turkey to Iran. Winters in sub-Saharan Africa.)

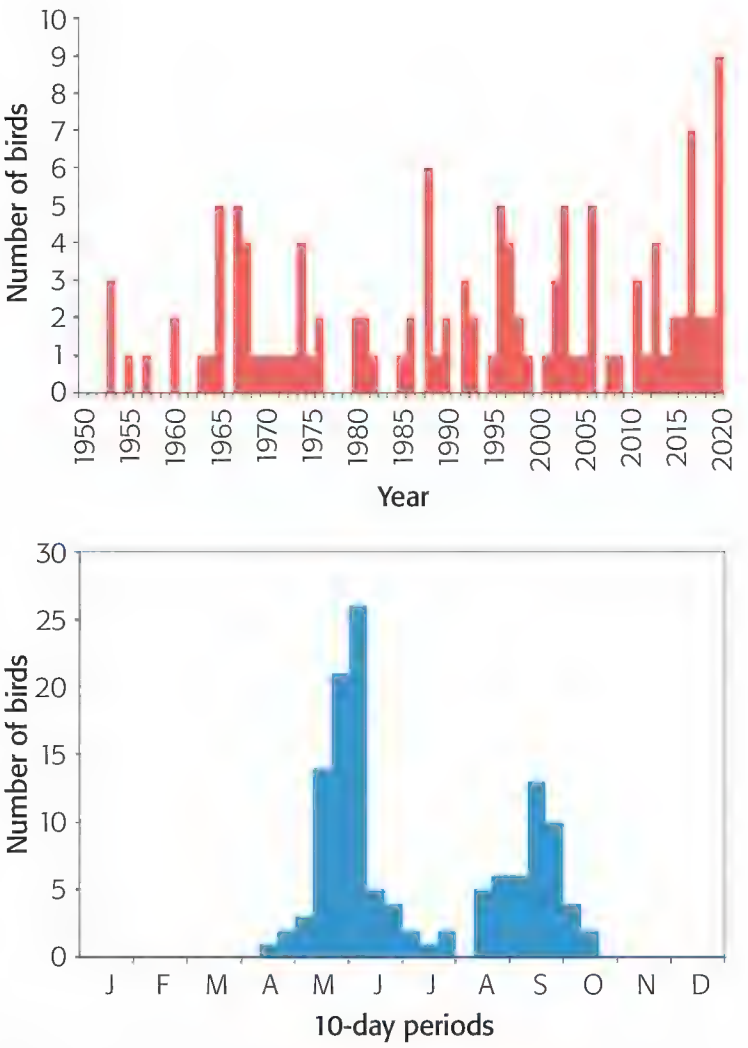

Figure 2. Annual and seasonal occurrence of Woodchat Shrike in Scotland by 10-day periods, 1950–2020.

Plate 81. Woodchat Shrike, male, The Shunan, Harray, Mainland, Orkney, 7–11 June 2020. © *Alastair Forsyth*

Woodlark *Lullula arborea*
68 (1950–2004): 30: 1

Table 15. Accepted record of Woodlark in Scotland, 2020.

2020:	**Orkney** Twingness, North Ronaldsay, 3 November to 2021, photo (A.E. Duncan *et al.*).	

Woodlark is rare in Scotland, found mostly in late autumn and early winter in the Northern Isles. There has been one instance of attempted breeding in Angus & Dundee during 1993 (Forrester *et al.* 2007). Since 1950, the majority of observations have been on the Northern Isles, with 70% on Fair Isle and Shetland.

With just one bird seen in 2020, this species remains a rare bird in Scotland with almost all observations on islands. As the last accessible mainland record was during February 2008 at Peffer Sands, Scoughall (Lothian), another mainland bird would be much appreciated by many observers.

(Two subspecies. *L. a. arborea* breeds in north and central European areas from western Russia through Finland and Norway to England, where present north to Yorkshire. The other subspecies breeds from Iran and the Middle East through southern Europe to north-west Africa. Most populations move south to wintering areas, with more northerly populations moving the farthest.)

Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*
285: 104: 6

Table 16. Accepted record of Short-toed Lark in Scotland, 2020. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 17.

2020:	**North-East Scotland** St Fittick's Park, Nigg Bay, 9 November, photo (M. Lewis *et al.*).	

Short-toed Lark is found annually in Scotland in very small numbers, mostly in spring and autumn, with the majority of observations in the Northern Isles where records are assessed locally. It is very rare elsewhere, particularly on the mainland.

Table 17. Accepted records of Short-toed Lark in the Northern Isles, 2020.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	1	1	25 May	15–19 Oct
Orkney	1	-	5 Jun	-
Shetland	-	2	-	23 Sep–17 Oct

The occurrence at St Fittick's Park, Nigg Bay was the fourth for North-East Scotland but only the second on mainland Scotland since 2010, following the sighting at Tyninghame (Lothian) in 2017.

(Eight subspecies, with the subspecies seen in Scotland and the UK undetermined. Breeds widely in dry sandy areas from southern and eastern Europe to the Middle East and western China, with populations migrating to winter in Africa, the Middle East and India.)

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*
40: 54: 2

Table 18. Accepted records of Red-rumped Swallow in Scotland, 2020.

2020:	**Fair Isle** Aesterhoull & various locations, 28 May to 1 June, photo (D. Parnaby, D.N. Shaw *et al.*).
	Shetland North Biggins, Foula, 28 June, photo (D. & G. Atherton *per* Local Recorder).

Red-rumped Swallow is observed in Scotland annually in very small numbers from April through to November, mainly along the east coast and on islands. An increase in frequency over the last 15 years is thought to reflect a northward expansion of the European continental breeding range; around 56% of sightings in Scotland have occurred within this period.

Two individuals of an eastern subspecies, either *C. d. daurica* or *C. d. japonica*, have been observed in Scotland: one on Orkney and then Skye, Skye & Lochalsh, Highland, in June 2011, and the other 'At Sea' c. 50 km east of Lybster, Caithness in May 2018 (McInerny & McGowan 2020).

The two occurrences in 2020 were typical of the usual timing and location for Scotland.

(Eight subspecies. Breeds widely from southern Europe eastwards across the Palearctic region, and in sub-Saharan Africa. *C. d. rufula* breeds in Europe and the Middle East, with nominate *daurica* and *japonica* in Asia. Northern populations are migratory wintering in Africa and southern Asia. In recent years its range has expanded into more northern and western European areas.)

Radde's Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi*
46: 30: 11

Table 19. Accepted records of Radde's Warbler in Scotland, 2020.

2020:	**Shetland** Maywick, Mainland, 26–27 September, photo (R. Hughes, N. O'Hanlon *et al.*).
	Shetland Skaw, Whalsay, 1–3 October, photo (J.L. Irvine *et al.*).
	Shetland Freyers, Foula, 1 October, photo (M.J. McKee, C. Turner).
	Shetland Rerwick, Mainland, 2–3 October (P.A. Bloomer, P.V. Harvey *et al.*).
	Shetland Virkie, Mainland, 3 October (R. Riddington, R.M. Tallack *et al.*).
	Shetland Brake, Mainland, 4 October (P.V. Harvey).
	Shetland Lea Gardens, Tresta, Mainland, 9 October, trapped, photo (P.A. Harris, R.J. Nason).
	Shetland Isbister, North Roe, Mainland, 9 October, photo (P. & H. Hutchinson *per* Local Recorder).
	Shetland Culswick Marsh, Mainland, 26 October, photo (W.T.S. Miles).
	Shetland Clickimin, Lerwick, Mainland, 29 October (R.M. Mellor).
	Shetland Norwick, Unst, 10 November, photo (D. Cooper).

Radde's Warbler is a rare, now almost annual autumn visitor to Scotland, with the majority of occurrences in the Northern Isles, principally Shetland, and the remaining few along the east coast (Figure 3).

The total of 11 sightings in 2020 is the highest annual number since the first occurrence of Radde's Warbler in Scotland in 1962. The previous highest annual total of six has been noted four times, in 1988, 1991, 2001 and 2010.

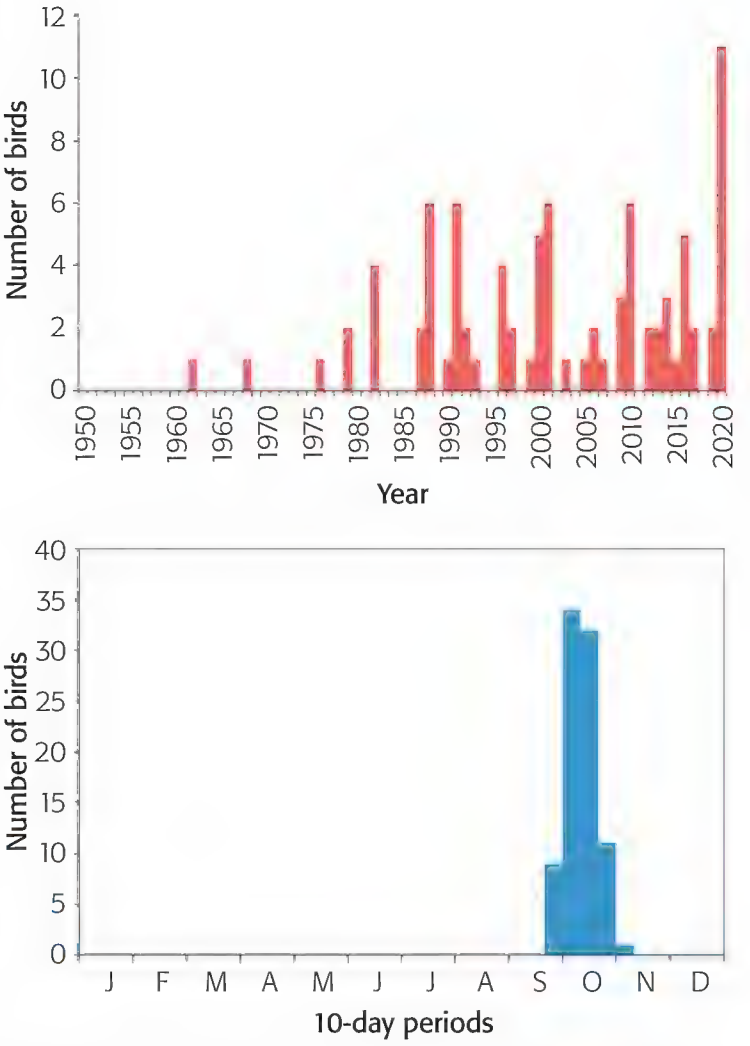

Figure 3. Annual and seasonal occurrence of Radde's Warblers in Scotland by 10-day periods, 1950–2020.

Plate 82. Radde's Warbler, Isbister, North Roe, Mainland, Shetland, 9 October 2020. © *Rob Hutchinson*

The 2020 sighting on Unst on 10 November is the latest date for the species in Scotland. Almost half the occurrences (48.3%) have been in Shetland.

(Breeds from southern Siberia east to Sakhalin and North Korea; migrates to winter in southern China and south-east Asia.)

Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*
59: 64: 12

Table 20. Accepted records of Dusky Warbler in Scotland, 2020.

2020: **Argyll** Balephuil, Tiree, 14 October, photo (J. Bowler) (*Scottish Birds* 41: 86–89).
Fife Balcomie Castle, 6 October (G. Robertson).
Highland Redpoint Farm, near Opinan, Gairloch, Ross & Cromarty, 9–10 November, photo (P. Stronach *et al.*) (*Scottish Birds* 41: 86–89).
Outer Hebrides Gleann (Glen), Barra, 5–7 November, photo, audio (B.A. Taylor *et al.*) (*Scottish Birds* 41: 86–89).

Dusky Warbler is a rare annual visitor to Scotland, with the autumn migration period accounting for all but two sightings. It occurs mainly in the Northern Isles where records are assessed locally. Nearly all other sightings have been along the east coast of mainland Scotland.

Table 21. Accepted records of Dusky Warbler in the Northern Isles, 2020.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	-	2		14–27 Oct
Orkney	-	-	-	-
Shetland	-	6	-	5 Oct–13 Nov

Most occurrences in 2020 were in the Northern Isles, though there were four sightings in other areas. The observations on Tiree (Argyll) and at Redpoint Farm, near Opinan (Ross & Cromarty) were the first for these recording areas (Bowler *et al.* 2021); the latter is notable as a west coast mainland occurrence. The Fife and Outer Hebrides sightings were third records for both areas.

(Breeds from western Siberia to China, wintering from the Himalayas to south China; two subspecies, with European vagrants belonging to nominate *P. f. fuscatus*.)

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*
157: 123: 19

Table 22. Accepted records of Greenish Warbler in Scotland, 2020. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 23.

2020: **Borders** Mire Loch, St Abbs Head, 26 August, photo (P. Safford).
Fife Fife Ness, 17 August, trapped, photo (C. Broome, W. Cresswell, K.D. Shaw *et al.*).
Highland Tarbat Ness, Ross & Cromarty, 26 August, photo (P. Stronach, B. Swann *et al.*) (*Scottish Birds* 41: 76).
Isle of May second-calendar-year or older, trapped, 25 June, photo (M. Newell *et al.*).
Isle of May first-calendar-year or older, trapped, 13 August, photo (M. Martin *et al.*).
Lothian Barns Ness, first-calendar-year, 22–24 August, photo, audio (M. Cavanagh *et al.*).

Plate 83. Greenish Warbler, Tarbat Ness, Ross & Cromarty, Highland, 26 August 2020. © *Peter Stronach*

Greenish Warbler is a rare but annual migrant to Scotland, increasingly regular over the past few decades (McInerny & McGowan 2021). It is mostly seen in late August and early September, with smaller numbers in late May and early June; about 70% of sightings have been in the Northern Isles where records are assessed locally.

Table 23. Accepted records of Greenish Warbler in the Northern Isles, 2020.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	1	-	15 Jun	-
Orkney	-	-	-	-
Shetland	2	10	10–26 Jun	19 Aug–9 Sep

The sighting at Tarbat Ness, Ross & Cromarty was only the second occurrence for Highland (Stronach 2021). The bird which lingered for a few days at Barns Ness, was the third occurrence in Lothian.

The mean annual total over the last decade is double that of the previous decade, i.e. 11.8 compared with 5.3.

(Four subspecies. *P. t. viridanus* breeds from the Baltic east through Russia to central Siberia and north-west China, wintering in the Indian subcontinent and Sri Lanka. Other subspecies breed in central and Eastern Palearctic areas, wintering in southern India and northern Indochina.)

Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*
164: 114: 12

Table 24. Accepted records of Arctic Warbler in Scotland, 2020.

2020: **Fair Isle** Lower Leogh, Chapel Plantation & Plantation, second-calendar-year or older, trapped, 31 August to 7 September, photo (S. Arlow *et al.*).
Fair Isle Nether Taft & various locations, first-calendar-year, 1–4 September, photo (D. Gornall, D.N. Shaw *et al.*).
Fife The Patch, Fife Ness, first-calendar-year, trapped, 6–8 October, photo (C. Broome, W. Cresswell, S. Pinder, K.D. Shaw *et al.*).
Shetland The Manse, Foula, 23 August, photo (D. & G. Atherton *per* Local Recorder).
Shetland Spiggie, Mainland, first-calendar-year, 30 August, photo (J. Morton *per* Local Recorder).
Shetland Windhouse, Yell, 1–3 September, photo (A. Kettle).
Shetland Skaw, Unst, 1–2 September, photo (D. Cooper *et al.*).
Shetland Maywick, Mainland, first-calendar-year, 3–4 September, photo (P.V. Harvey *et al.*).
Shetland Camb, Yell, 3 September, photo (A. Kettle).
Shetland Skaw, Unst, 17–18 September, photo (D. Cooper *et al.*).
Shetland Cullivoe & Gutcher, Yell, 29 September to 4 October, photo (R. Kelsh, A. Mears, J. Nangle *et al.*).
Shetland Voe, Mainland, 5–6 October, photo (T. & K. Allison, S.H.M. Butcher *et al.*).

Arctic Warbler is a rare but annual and increasingly regular autumn migrant to Scotland occurring mostly in the Northern Isles and along the east coast (McInerny & McGowan 2021). It is most frequent in September, with fewer seen in late August and October; very small numbers are seen in late June and July; about 90% of observations have been in the Northern Isles.

The 12 sightings in Scotland in 2020 represent the second highest annual total, almost matching the 13 seen in 2016. With one exception, all were in the Northern Isles; the individual trapped at Fife Ness in early October was the third Fife record. The last blank year for Scotland is 2008.

(Breeds from northern Fennoscandia to the Bering Straits and west Alaska, and south to the Ural Mountains, Mongolia and Korea. Winters from Myanmar to Indonesia and the Philippines.)

Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*
53: 23: 2

Table 25. Accepted records of Melodious Warbler in Scotland, 2020.

2020: **Shetland** Gord, Fetlar, 22 August, photo (B.H. Thomason *et al.*).
Shetland Burrastow, Mainland, 5 October, photo (P.V. Harvey, R. Riddington, R.M. Tallack *et al.*).

Melodious Warbler is a rare spring and autumn migrant to Scotland recorded in most years but not all. About three quarters of occurrences have been in the Northern Isles.

Both occurrences in 2020 were in Shetland on typical dates. During the last two decades only two sightings have been made on the Scottish mainland; both were at St Abb's Head, Borders, the first in May 2002 and the second in September 2018.

(Breeds in north Africa, Iberia, France, Belgium, and south-west Germany to the north-west Balkans; migrates to winter in sub-Saharan West Africa.)

Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*
139: 36: 2

Nightingale is a rare, but almost annual, passage migrant to Scotland; spring observations predominate. In the Northern Isles claims are assessed locally and Fair Isle and Shetland account for the vast majority of sightings.

Only two observations were made in Scotland in 2020; one at Holland House, North Ronaldsay, Orkney on 5–7 May and the other at Ham, Foula, Shetland on 2–4 June.

The last Scottish mainland occurrence of Nightingale was at Garthdee, North-East Scotland on 7 May 2007.

(Nominate *L. m. megarhynchos* breeds from Morocco and western Europe through North Africa and southern and central Europe to the Ukraine and Turkey; *L. m. golzii* breeds from the Aral Sea to Mongolia (one record in Scotland, and another two in England); and another subspecies from the Caucasus area and eastern Turkey to Iran. Winters in sub-Saharan Africa.)

Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus*
15: 74: 10

Table 26. Accepted records of Red-flanked Bluetail in Scotland, 2020.

2020: **Fair Isle** Jivvy Geo, first-calendar-year, 14 October, photo (S. Thompson, D. Parnaby *et al.*).
Fair Isle Gully, first-calendar-year, 16 October, trapped, photo (D. Parnaby *et al.*).
Orkney Swannay, Birsay, Mainland, first-calendar-year, male, trapped, 7–8 October, photo (K. Fairclough *et al.*).
Orkney Whitehowe, Papa Westray, 3 October, photo (D. Roche *et al.*).
Outer Hebrides Creachan Community Woodland, Barra, adult, female, 17–26 October, trapped, photo (S.L. Rivers *et al.*) (*Scottish Birds* 41: 180–184).
Shetland Norwick, Unst, first-calendar-year/female, 27 September (G. Wyatt *et al.*).
Shetland Skaw, Whalsay, 6 October, photo (J.L. Irvine *et al.*).
Shetland Beosetter, Bressay, 6 October (J. Badley, A. Bentley).
Shetland Norwick, Unst, 10 October, photo (D. Cooper *et al.*).
Shetland Sand Lodge, Sandwick, Mainland, 12–17 October, photo (P.M. Ellis *et al.*).

Red-flanked Bluetail is a rare but annual migrant to Scotland, increasingly regular in the last two decades. The vast majority (93%) of sightings in Scotland have been from September to mid-November with a peak in mid-October, and 82% have been in the Northern Isles.

Nine of the ten sightings in 2020 were in the Northern Isles. The exception, a second occurrence for Outer Hebrides, was an individual which lingered for ten days on Barra (Rivers 2021). Since 2016 there have been five sightings on mainland Scotland, all in October on the east coast: Borders (St Abb's), Fife (Crail), Highland (Tarbat Ness) (all 2016), Caithness (Wick) (2017) and North-East Scotland (Rattray Head) (2019).

(Breeds in Finland through Eurasia to Kamchatka and south to Mongolia, China and Japan. Migrates to winter in China and south-east Asia. In recent years its range has expanded into more northern and western European areas.)

Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*
105: 103: 15

Table 27. Accepted records of Citrine Wagtail in Scotland, 2020.

2020: **Fair Isle** Boini Mire, Da Water & Field Ditch, first-calendar-year, 4–16 September, photo (A. Penn *et al.*)
Fair Isle Furse, Da Water & Setter, first-calendar-year, 29 September to 8 October, photo (D. Gornall *et al.*) (*Scottish Birds* 41: 354–356).

North-East Scotland Aberdeen beach, first-calendar-year, 6 October, photo, audio, DNA evidence indicated nominate subspecies *citreola* (R. Mavor *et al. per* Local Recorder).
Orkney North Wick, Papa Westray, male, 7 May to 17 June, photo (D. Roche *et al.*).
Orkney Quivals & Lettan, Sanday, adult, 26–29 August, photo (A. Whewell).
Outer Hebrides Cleit (Cleat), Barra, first-calendar-year, 23 September, photo, audio (B.A. Taylor *et al.*).
Shetland Ham, Foula, male, 1–2 June, photo (D. & G. Atherton *per* Local Recorder); same **Fair Isle** Da Water, male, in song, 4–24 June, photo (D. Parnaby *et al.*).
Shetland Virkie & Boddam, Mainland, first-calendar-year, 12–14 August, photo (G.F. Bell, P.V. Harvey).
Shetland Baltasound, Unst, 18–20 August, photo (D. Cooper *per* Local Recorder).
Shetland Sumburgh & Virkie, Mainland, first-calendar-year, 31 August, photo, audio (A.H.J. Harrop, R. Riddington).
Shetland Swinister Burn, Mainland, first-calendar-year, 2–9 September, photo (G.A. Tyler *per* Local Recorder *et al.*).
Shetland Hillswick, Mainland, first-calendar-year, 4 September, photo (A.H.J. Harrop).
Shetland Grutness & Quendale, Mainland, first-calendar-year, 16 September, photo (A.H.J. Harrop, P.V. Harvey, R. Riddington).
Shetland Sumburgh Hotel & West Voe of Sumburgh, Mainland, first-calendar-year, 23 September (R.M. Fray, K. Kelly).
Shetland Loch of Norby, Mainland, first-calendar-year, 4 October, photo (H. Murphy *per* Local Recorder).

Citrine Wagtail is a rare but annual spring and autumn migrant to Scotland, increasingly regular since the 1990s, though found mostly on islands. Occurrence is generally in autumn with few seen in spring. The overwhelming majority (86%) have been in the Northern Isles with a further 7% in Outer Hebrides. Despite the recent increase in numbers, Citrine Wagtail remains an extreme rarity in other parts of the country, not being seen in many recording areas.

The 15 sightings in 2020 matched the highest annual total in 2008, reinforcing the increased observation rate in recent years. The mean annual sightings over the last decade was 7.8 birds per year, compared with 6.7 and 4.1 in the two preceding decades.

An observation of particular note was a well-studied individual on Aberdeen beach. This was the third record of Citrine Wagtail for North-East Scotland and close scrutiny involving images, audio recording and DNA evidence indicated that it was nominate *citreola*.

Of interest, also, was an occurrence on 1–2 June on Foula, Shetland as the same bird was later sighted during 4–24 June on Fair Isle, where it was heard in song. SBRC considered the submission of another sighting on Fair Isle later in the year to be of particularly high quality and it featured in a short article in *Scottish Birds* (Gornall *et al.* 2021).

(Nominate *M. c. citreola* breeds in Russia from Kola Peninsula to River Khatanga, south to Himalayas; another subspecies in Iran and Afghanistan. Migrates to winter in China, south-east Asia, the Indian subcontinent and the Arabian Gulf.)

Serin *Serinus serinus*
7: 5: 2

Table 28. Accepted records of Serin in Scotland, 2020.

2020:	**Shetland** Scatness, Mainland, second-calendar-year, male, 25–29 May, photo (R. Riddington *et al.*).
	North-East Scotland Collieston, second-calendar-year, female, 15–17 June, photo (L. Goodwin, D. Short *et al.*) (*Scottish Birds* 40: 363–365).

Serin is an extremely rare vagrant to Scotland, with just 12 previous records: four on Fair Isle, three on Shetland (Unst and Fetlar), two on the Outer Hebrides, and one each in Lothian

Plate 84. Serin, male, second-calendar-year, Scatness, Mainland, Shetland, 25–29 May 2020. © *Roger Riddington*

(Edinburgh), Borders (St Abbs), the Isle of May (McGowan & McInerny 2021). Six were males and six females, with birds being found in April (4), May (6), August (1) and November (1).

There were two sightings in 2020. The individual at Scatness was the first for mainland Shetland and the occurrence at Collieston was the first for North-East Scotland, and also the first in June (Godwin & Short 2020). Around a third of sightings of Serin in Scotland have been in the last three years.

(Breeds from the Canary Islands, North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula to Germany, Denmark and the Middle East. Northern populations migrate south, remaining within the breeding range.)

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*
many: 68: 2

Ortolan Bunting is a rare and declining, but still annual, passage migrant to Scotland. In recent years the Northern Isles, where records are assessed locally, have accounted for more than 90% of occurrences. The general trend of decreasing numbers over the last two decades appears to be continuing. This reflects the steep decline of the west European population since 1980, thought to be due to unsustainable illegal hunting as a gastronomic delicacy, and habitat destruction (Jiguet *et al.* 2019).

In 2020 no Ortolan Buntings were seen away from the Northern Isles. Just two were noted, both in Shetland: there was one at Velzie, Fetlar on 3–6 October and another at Skaw, Whalsay on 7 October.

The last time the annual total reached double figures was in 1999 when there were 18 occurrences; since then, single birds have appeared three times, in 2004, 2005 and 2014.

(Breeds patchily from Algeria and Iberia north to Norway and east through Europe to Asia; winters in sub-Saharan Africa.)

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Appendix 1

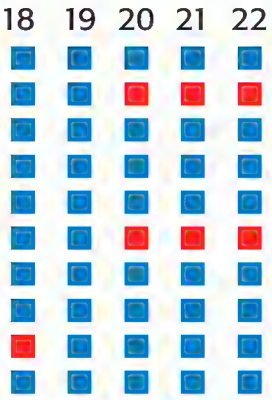
List of records regarded as not proven by SBRC.

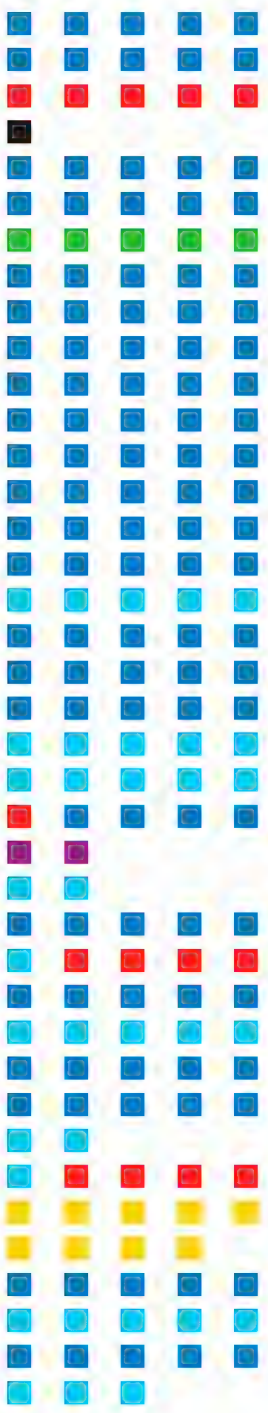
2020: **Caspian Gull** Ravensheugh Sands, Scoughall, Lothian, 27 March; **Cory's Shearwater** Barn's Ness, Lothian, 18 September; **Radde's Warbler** Aith, Cunningsburgh, Mainland, Shetland, 4 October; **Citrine Wagtail** Strathbeg Lagoon, North-East Scotland, 20 August; **Parrot Crossbill** two, Sullom Plantation, Mainland, Shetland 16 October.

1896: **Scottish Crossbill** four, Newport, Fife, 7 January; **Scottish Crossbill** Scotscraig, Fife, 25 December.

Appendix 2

Summary of assessment of records by the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC), the SBRC List, and other committees, 2017-21. All species and subspecies assessed by SBRC are included with two exceptions. First, any species or subspecies not on the *Scottish List* is automatically assessed by SBRC if it is not assessed by the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC). Second, some species on the *Scottish List* have additional rare subspecies assessed by BBRC that are not shown here. Species and subspecies considered by BBRC are listed on www.bbrc.org.uk/main-information/species-taxa





Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis* (except *L. m. atlantis* - BBRC)
White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*
Franz Josef Land Little Auk *Alle alle polaris*
White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*
Wilson's Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*
Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris borealis*
Great Shearwater *Ardenna gravis*
Night-heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*
Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*
Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*
Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*
Black Kite *Milvus migrans*
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dryobates minor*
Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*
Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator* (except *L. s. badius* - BBRC)
Woodlark *Lullula arborea*
Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*
Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica* (except *C. d. daurica* or *japonica* - BBRC)
Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*
Radde's Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi*
Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*
Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*
Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*
Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*
Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*
Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*
Western/Eastern Subalpine Warbler *Curruca iberiae/cantillans**
Dartford Warbler *Curruca undata*
Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* (except *L. m. golzii* - BBRC)
Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus*
Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*
Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*
Arctic Redpoll *Acanthis hornemanni**
Parrot Crossbill *Loxia pytyopsittacus*
Scottish Crossbill *Loxia scotica*
Serin *Serinus serinus*
Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*
Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus*
Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*

■ = SBRC ■ = BBRC ■ = SBRC except Northern Isles (Fair Isle, Orkney and Shetland) ■ = SBRC except Shetland and Outer Hebrides ■ = SBRC except Fair Isle and Shetland ■ = SBRC except Outer Hebrides ■ = SBRC outside core range www.the-soc.org.uk/content/bird-recording/sbrc/identification-of-scottish-and-parrot-crossbills

* From 1 January 2019, all records to be considered by BBRC.

The species and subspecies considered by SBRC listed here are also shown on www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/sbrc-list-past-lists

Appendix 3

Corrections to the SBRC Excel spreadsheets with two records removed:
Short-toed Lark, West Geirinis (Gerinish), South Uist, 1 October 2000;
Dusky Warbler, Bornish, South Uist, 24–25 October 2004.

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Plate 85. Male Honey-buzzard, Highland, Scotland, 16 June 2021. © *Adam Ritchie*

Scottish Honey-buzzard survey, 2020–2021

C.J. McINERNY, C. MILLER & K.D. SHAW

Summary

A survey of the Scottish Honey-buzzard *Pernis apivorus* population was completed during 2020–2021. Around 120 surveyors monitored potential breeding areas across the country from May to September during these two years. Honey-buzzards were recorded breeding in seven local authority areas in Scotland and probably breeding in a further two, with 56 territories identified. This is a considerable increase in the number of territories recorded during the previous 2000 survey, when 14 were located.

Introduction

The Honey-buzzard is a rare and under-recorded species in Scotland and Britain, with much debate over the years about the size of the British breeding population. A British-wide survey in 2000 established that Honey-buzzards were present across Scotland, England and Wales, with 59 territories reported of which 14 were located in Scotland, and breeding outcome recorded from 27 pairs (Batten 2001, Ogilvie 2003, Clements *et al.* 2022). Subsequent reports by the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP) noted lower British numbers of 35–50 occupied territories annually but emphasised that coverage was probably incomplete. The British population was subsequently estimated at 100–150 pairs (Roberts & Law 2014). Of this the Scottish population, in the early 21st century, was predicted to be about 50 pairs (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

A second British survey was suggested for 2020 with the support of the RBBP. We planned the Scottish contribution by establishing regional coordinators and recruiting surveyors through talks and notices (McInerny *et al.* 2021), with Rob Clements and Steve Roberts undertaking the same in England and Wales respectively (Clements *et al.* 2022). In Scotland about 120 observers were recruited with Ian Francis (North-East Scotland), Mark Holling (south-east Scotland), David Jardine (Argyll), Ron Lawie (Angus), and Paul Collin and Chris Rollie (south-west Scotland) acting as regional coordinators.

Despite the challenges of running a national bird survey during the COVID-19 pandemic travel restrictions, some coverage through 2020 was achieved in many areas although survey work was limited largely to July and August; thus, the survey was extended to 2021, from May to September when travel restrictions were relaxed.

Methods

Honey-buzzards are challenging birds to survey. They are normally difficult to observe but are more visible during July and August when they can be seen carrying food to young at nests and/or displaying above territories (McInerny & Shaw 2018, Shaw *et al.* 2021). Hence the bulk of the survey work was undertaken in July and August, although some known Honey-buzzard breeding sites were monitored from mid to late May. Surveyors chose vantage points that gave wide views over selected woodland and watched typically for 3–4 hours, although sometimes up to 10 hours (Shaw *et al.* 2021). Weather conditions were important, with sunny, windy weather optimal for raptor species to fly above the woodland canopy. Observers were issued with advice based on our collective experience to locate birds, but also criteria by which to categorise observations of Honey-buzzards which included:

1. Confirmed Breeding: active nest, observation of food being taken into nesting wood, mature young, 'branching' young, flying juveniles.
2. Failed Breeding: direct evidence that breeding attempt failed.
3. Territory: aerial display seen, with male and female both present.
4. Display: area where aerial display seen, perhaps only once.
5. Birds Present: multiple birds, including probable non-breeders, seen more than once.
6. Bird Present: single bird not on migration, in suitable breeding habitat, seen only once.

At some locations where long-term studies have been completed, nests were visited under licence and young birds ringed. At most sites, however, no attempt to locate the nest was made, so proof of breeding depended on persistent observations from vantage points looking for repeated food-carrying flights to the presumed nest-site or, in late August/early September, watching for juveniles in flight above the nest area (McInerny *et al.* 2022).

At the end of the two seasons, we collated results from surveyors, along with reports of Honey-buzzards from Local Recorders, Scottish Raptor Study Groups and other sources. Records were classified as either confirmed breeding, failed breeding or the presence of pairs where breeding success was unknown, following published criteria (Hardey *et al.* 2013). More difficult to interpret were records of single birds seen on several dates that could indicate breeding but alternatively might be a non-breeding bird holding territory, and of single birds reported on one date only. We attempted to categorise these in the same way that they were classified for the 2000 survey identifying confirmed breeding and probable/possible breeding (Batten 2001, Ogilvie 2003, Hardey *et al.* 2013), to ensure comparability of results between the two surveys.

Results

During 2020–2021 in Scotland 56 territories were identified, including 22 confirmed breeding and 34 probable/possible breeding territories, from a British total of 116 territories, with 48 confirmed breeding and 68 probable/possible breeding territories (Table 1, Clements *et al.* 2022). As with the 2000 survey, possible/ probable breeding accounted for around half of the records (Batten 2001, Ogilvie 2003).

Scotland has a long history of breeding Honey-buzzards, with small numbers of birds present mostly in the Highland region, but also in the north-east and south-west of the country (McInerny & Shaw 2019). More recently, systematic monitoring across central Scotland found a local population of up to 10 pairs. The success of this monitoring encouraged other observers to search elsewhere in Scotland,

Table 1. 2020–2021 Scottish and British Honey-buzzard survey results: numbers of territories. Note that the English and Welsh totals are for 2020 only (Clements *et al.* 2022).

	Confirmed breeding	Probable/Possible breeding	Total
Scotland	22	34	56
England	25	30	55
Wales	1	4	5
TOTAL	48	68	116

Table 2. Comparison between 2000 and 2020–2021 Scottish and British Honey-buzzard surveys: numbers of territories. Note that the English and Welsh totals are for 2020 only (Clements *et al.* 2022).

	2000	2020–2021
Scotland	14	56
England	35	55
Wales	10	5
TOTAL	59	116

resulting in more birds being located and more cases of confirmed breeding. This success continued during the national survey and accounts for the increased number of birds being found, with up to 56 territories in 2020–2021, up from the 14 identified during the 2000 national survey (Table 2).

Central Scotland

The increase in pairs in Scotland was the biggest in Britain since the 2000 survey with the largest increase in central Scotland, which is made up of the local authorities of Perth & Kinross (including Perthshire) and Central Region (including Upper Forth). In central Scotland Honey-buzzards were first recorded in the early 19th century and only occasionally reported through the first half of the 20th century, but it was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s that it was recognised that nesting occurred annually, with 1–2 pairs present (McInerny & Shaw 2022). In the years before the survey eight study areas were established in central Scotland, which revealed populations of up to ten pairs in one area.

During 2020, 11 pairs of Honey-buzzards bred in central Scotland, nine successfully, another nine were categorised as 'territory', and a further two were 'bird present' (Clements *et al.* 2022). Fewer proven breeders were identified in 2021 but, significantly, birds were shown to breed in a new location. Central Scotland is a very large area with much potential habitat for breeding Honey-buzzards. Thus, the figures presented for 2020–2021 probably underestimate the true population size. This is supported by the observation that Honey-buzzards were not found at six sites in central Scotland during the survey period that were used in the previous five years.

Highland and Moray

In Highland and Moray, raptor workers have been aware of Honey-buzzards since at least the mid-1970s. Several key areas were identified in this very large area and many of these sites continue to be occupied, although numbers fluctuate from year to year. Indeed, there are some years when very few birds have been recorded. During the survey years 2020–2021, 64 sites were monitored for occupancy and birds were present in 20 different locations, in six districts. Six active nests were confirmed and four were successful. Pairs were present in a further three locations indicating a total of nine occupied territories. However, the possible/probable number of territories is likely to be higher, given the amount of potential habitat in the area and the relatively small number of surveyors.

Plate 86. Male Honey-buzzard carrying a Common Frog *Rana temporaria*, Highland, Scotland, 2 August 2021. © *Adam Ritchie*

Elsewhere in Scotland
Smaller numbers of birds were found elsewhere with breeding pairs in Dumfries & Galloway, Angus and Aberdeenshire. Two areas where breeding was not confirmed were Argyll and Borders. Considerable effort was put into these large, afforested areas: a territory was noted in Borders and single birds were seen in Argyll.

Discussion

Trends between 2000 and 2020–2021
The survey showed a major increase in numbers reported in Scotland, a small increase in England and a reduction in Wales (Clements *et al.* 2022, Table 2). It confirmed that there are three main core areas of Britain with substantial Honey-buzzard populations: central Scotland (Upper Forth and Perth & Kinross), northern Scotland (Highland region and Moray), and southern England (Sussex, Hampshire and surrounding counties).

Another trend revealed by the two surveys 20 years apart was that the western half of Britain appears to have lost much of the population that was recorded in the 2000 survey, with absences from former breeding locations in Devon, Wales, Shropshire and Cumbria, and further north only a handful of reports from Argyll and Dumfries & Galloway. The trend towards wetter summers over the past twenty to thirty years could be a factor resulting in a reduction in wasp grubs, an important food item for Honey-buzzards.

Breeding densities
Breeding densities over large areas of Britain remain low, but there was evidence of the establishment of groups breeding at higher density than previously recorded. In central Scotland, up to 10 pairs were present in 90 km^2 of well-wooded habitat, although this fluctuated between years from 12 to 32 individuals during 2016 to 2020 (McInerny & Shaw 2022). In Sussex during 2020 five pairs occupied a 30 km^2 study-area of mixed woodland (Clements *et al.* 2022). In comparison, the maximum population recorded over sixty years of study in the New Forest was nine pairs in around 570 km^2 (Wiseman 2014).

Honey-buzzards were recorded breeding in seven local authority areas in Scotland and probably breeding in a further two, with 56 territories identified. This is similar to the predicted numbers for the early 21st century when the population was suggested to be about 50 pairs (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

If the estimates for the three main British core areas, central and northern Scotland and southern England, amounting to around 100 pairs/territories, are correct, and the population in the rest of Britain is predicted to be around 30–50 pairs, the true British population could be around 150 pairs/territories in total. For the true population to be much higher than this would require the presence of substantial undiscovered or unreported groups of breeding Honey-buzzards in parts of Britain away from the three core areas. This appears unlikely, especially given the reduction in records from the more western parts of Britain noted in the 2020–2021 survey.

Acknowledgements

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Plate 87. Nuthatch, Clachan Seil, Argyll, January 2021. © *David C. Jardine*

Nuthatches in Argyll

M. CHATTWOOD, J.M. DICKSON & D.C. JARDINE

Following a failed 19th century introduction attempt there was a low level of largely unconfirmed sightings during the latter half of the 20th century. Sightings have been annual since 1999, increasing in 2008, but then stalling until 2013, following which there has been a rapid expansion in the number of sites occupied. A survey in 2021 found that the species was well established in Cowal, mid and north Argyll, and establishing in north Kintyre and on Mull. The Survey in 2021 found Nuthatches in 109 1-km squares (40 10-km squares) and the population is estimated at around 130–150 pairs, which is expanding rapidly.

Introduction

The advance of the breeding range of the Nuthatch *Sitta europaea* into Scotland in the last few decades has been one of the more noticeable changes in the Scottish avifauna. Breeding was first confirmed in Borders in 1989 but may have occurred earlier; Nuthatches then spread into a large area of southern Scotland in the 1990s (Murray 1991, Forrester *et al.* 2007). By 2004, it was estimated there were 220 pairs at 80 sites in Borders and another 40 pairs estimated to have been present in Dumfries & Galloway and Ayrshire (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

Maxwell (2010) provided an update on the colonisation and population increase. By then there were an estimated 600–750 pairs in Borders, several hundred pairs in Dumfries & Galloway, and it was widespread in Ayrshire and to lesser extent in Lothian, and still gaining footholds in several neighbouring regions. McMillan (2019) reports that breeding was first confirmed in Highland in 2018 at Arisaig and Invermoriston, although he suggested that birds had been present in the region for over a decade and that colonisation was probably through north Argyll into Lochaber. However, Cosgrove *et al.* (2021) noted that they were not found on the nearby Glenfalloch Estate (Clyde/Upper Forth) until 2018, following which there has been a rapid expansion in numbers to 17 pairs on the estate.

This paper provides a more detailed history of the Nuthatch in Argyll and the results of a citizen science survey carried out by the Argyll Bird Club (ABC) in 2021.

Historical occurrence of Nuthatch in Argyll

While Forrester *et al.* (2007) note the mention of Nuthatch at Inveraray in the *New Statistical Account,* no details or further information on Nuthatches in this area, which was researched by ap Rheinallt *et al.* (2007), is provided. This is given in the correspondence of John Harvie-Brown with the progressive George John Douglas Campbell, 8th Duke of Argyll. In a letter dated 5 February 1889, the Duke describes his failure to introduce Red-winged Blackbirds *Agelaius phoeniceus* to Inveraray, and he continues:

I may mention that I have failed also in, perhaps, a more likely attempt which was to introduce into the large woods of this place the Common English Nuthatch. I got from a Dealer in birds at Brighton a good many couple [sic] of these birds and turned them out in most suitable tracts of old timber. Not one of them was seen again.

Murray (1991) when describing the first confirmed breeding attempts in the Borders refers to unconfirmed reports of attempted, and possibly, failed colonisation of the southern highlands in the late 1960s and 1970s. Some of these reports were from Argyll and included a bird seen in a garden at Dalmally on 22 June 1975 (SB 9:219) and one in January and February 1976 in Lochgilphead (*per* Ian Rainier) (SB 10:105). The observer of the latter bird also saw it in 1975 and later in 1976 and believed that Nuthatch bred in the area; there were also several other reports around the same time which were not published.

Ap Rheinallt *et al.* (2007) unearthed unpublished information in the Argyll Bird Recorder's files. In 1976, Mike Gregory wrote 'there do seem to be rather persistent scattered Nuthatch records from about six different independent observers e.g. Taynuilt, Dalmally, Loch Riddon, Loch Caolisport, over the last five years or so'. Furthermore, there are unconfirmed reports from mid-Argyll which extend back as far as the 1950s (Rainier 1975).

Following this there were, for over 20 years, no further accepted records in Argyll, indicating that this colonisation attempt failed. Ap Rheinallt *et al.* (2007), however, note that a number of scattered observations were reported from gardens in mainland Argyll. None of these were accepted and were difficult to evaluate as they came from casual observers who were unable to back up their sighting in sufficient detail, but Ap Rheinallt *et al.* (2007) comment that many, if not all, are likely to have been genuine as Nuthatch is such a distinctive bird.

21st century colonisation of Argyll

Nuthatch sightings reported to the ABC have been added to the Argyll Bird Database, which now total some 313 records for the period between 1999 and 2020. These were summarised by Dickson (2021).

The first bird noted in Argyll during this expansion was in 1999 at Glenbranter in Cowal, followed by a trickle of reports thereafter. It is likely that a few pairs may have started breeding in Argyll around this time. However, the first nest was not confirmed until 2011 at Ardkinglas Woodland in Cowal. (*contra* McMillan, 2019)) (Plate 88).

Plate 88. Nuthatch at first confirmed nesting site, Ardkinglas, Argyll, April 2011. © *Jim Dickson*

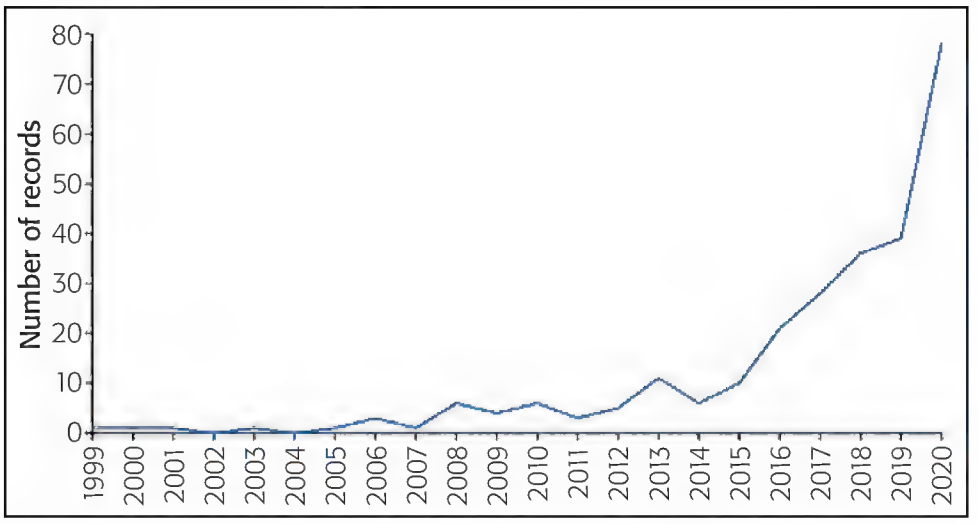

Figure 1. Number of Nuthatch records reported in Argyll, 1999–2020.

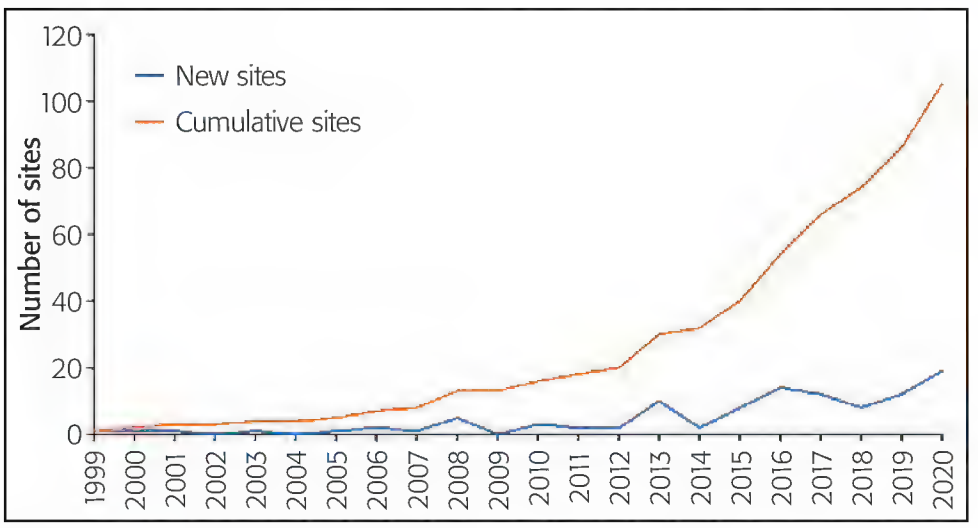

Figure 2. Number of sites at which Nuthatch has been recorded at in Argyll, 1999–2020.

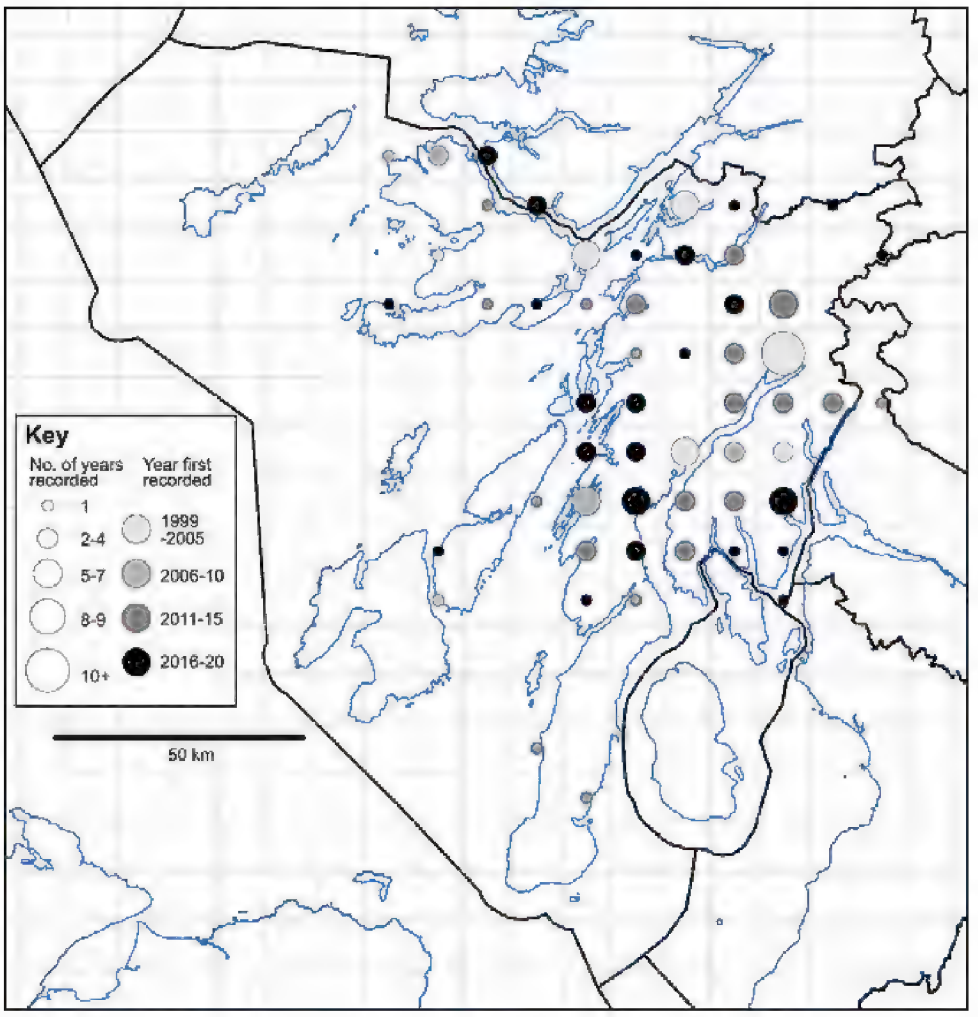

Figure 3. Colonisation of Argyll by Nuthatch, 1999–2020.

Expansion in Argyll, as indicated by an increase in reports, appeared to have started around 2008. However, it levelled off slightly between 2009 and 2012, which may have been linked to the severe winters of 2009/10 and 2010/11. From 2013, the number of birds being reported increased with some 30 sightings from ten new locations. Reports continued to increase through to the end of 2020, with more than 78 sightings from 19 new sites (Figure 2). Birds were often reported numerous times from the same localities; the number of new reported sites gives a better understanding of expansion over time.

Figure 2 provides an indicator of the population trend over time from limited *ad hoc* observations. Nuthatches are highly territorial, and it is likely that most observations will be of birds at feeders near to potential breeding areas. As such, many of the 105 reported locations since 1999 will be close to known breeding sites. However, some will have been associated with dispersing juveniles and non-territorial adults, as can be seen from the temporary occurrence of Nuthatches in some sites during 1999–2020 (Figure 3).

For bird recording purposes, Argyll is divided in to ten subregions. During 1999–2020 Nuthatches were recorded in all mainland regions as well as on the larger islands of Islay, Jura and Mull.

Summary of Nuthatch records in Argyll sub regions up to 2020

Coll:	No records.
Colonsay:	No records.
Cowal:	A good number and spread of records, as expected, as it lies closest to the main strongholds elsewhere in Scotland. The first confirmed breeding for Argyll was in 2011 at Ardkinglas woodland. (Plate 88) However, Nuthatches probably became established from as early as 2008.
Islay:	There was only one record of a bird at feeders in Bunnahabhainn in June 2020.
Jura:	Only one record of a bird calling at Jura House woodlands in December 2008.
Kintyre:	Only two confirmed records. Singles at Glenbarr in April 2012 and in Campbeltown in September 2013.
Mid-Argyll:	The main stronghold in Argyll, although some areas with apparently suitable habitat lack records.
Mull:	There was one unconfirmed record in 2001, followed by an influx of records from 2008 onwards, with a small scattering of records spread far and wide over the next ten years.
North Argyll:	There was only one record in 2005, prior to frequent records from 2013 onwards, including juveniles noted around the Barcaldine area.
Tiree:	No records.

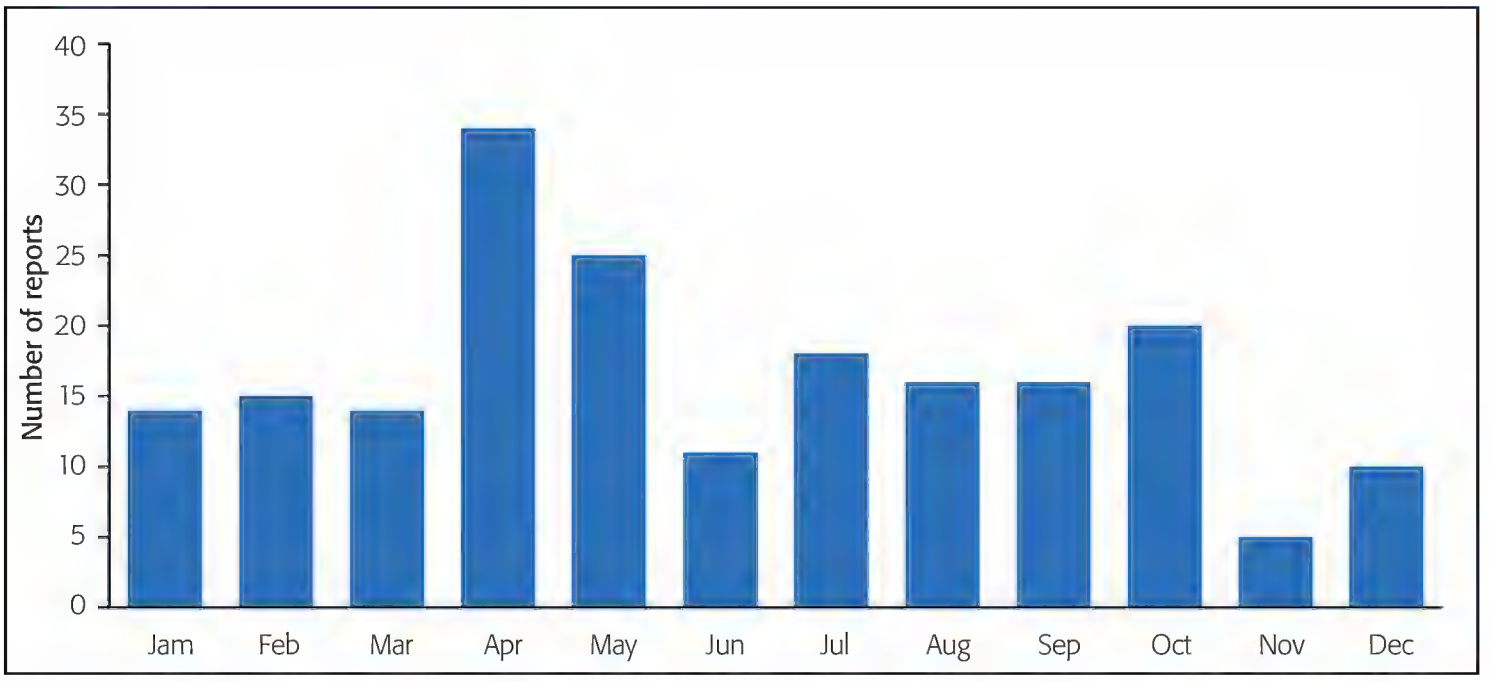

Figure 4. Monthly occurrence of Nuthatch records (first report) in Argyll, 1999–2020.

Sightings, when a bird is first noted in a location, in Argyll during 1999–2020 peaked in April and May, when the birds have nests (Figure 4). Observations at new sites then declined as young start to fledge in June and insect prey is more abundant, followed by a small increase in records through late summer and early autumn, when juveniles are perhaps moving around more and turning up in new areas. An apparent reduction of reports during November and December is interesting, as this is a period when it might be expected that birds would be more obvious at garden feeders, when other food sources have declined.

2021 Survey

Methods

The aims of the 2021 ABC Nuthatch Survey were to:

- Confirm the current distribution of Nuthatch in Argyll during the breeding season,
- Confirm the breeding status in as many locations as possible, and
- Estimate the breeding population of Nuthatch in Argyll.

The survey was advertised through the ABC website, newsletters and club events and was open to members and also the wider public, through local newspapers and through Argyll Natural History Group Facebook pages. Participants were asked to record the location of the sighting (including grid reference where possible), the activity of the Nuthatch(es) (feeding, singing, defending a territory, at a nest etc.) and to report back through the ABC records spreadsheet, Birdtrack, a dedicated Email address and Facebook. These records were collated by the organisers. Some ABC members also undertook play-back surveys, which were noted to be effective by Murray (1991) in suitable habitat, particularly in outlying areas to try to establish the boundary of the range of Nuthatch in Argyll. Negative records from play-back were recorded.

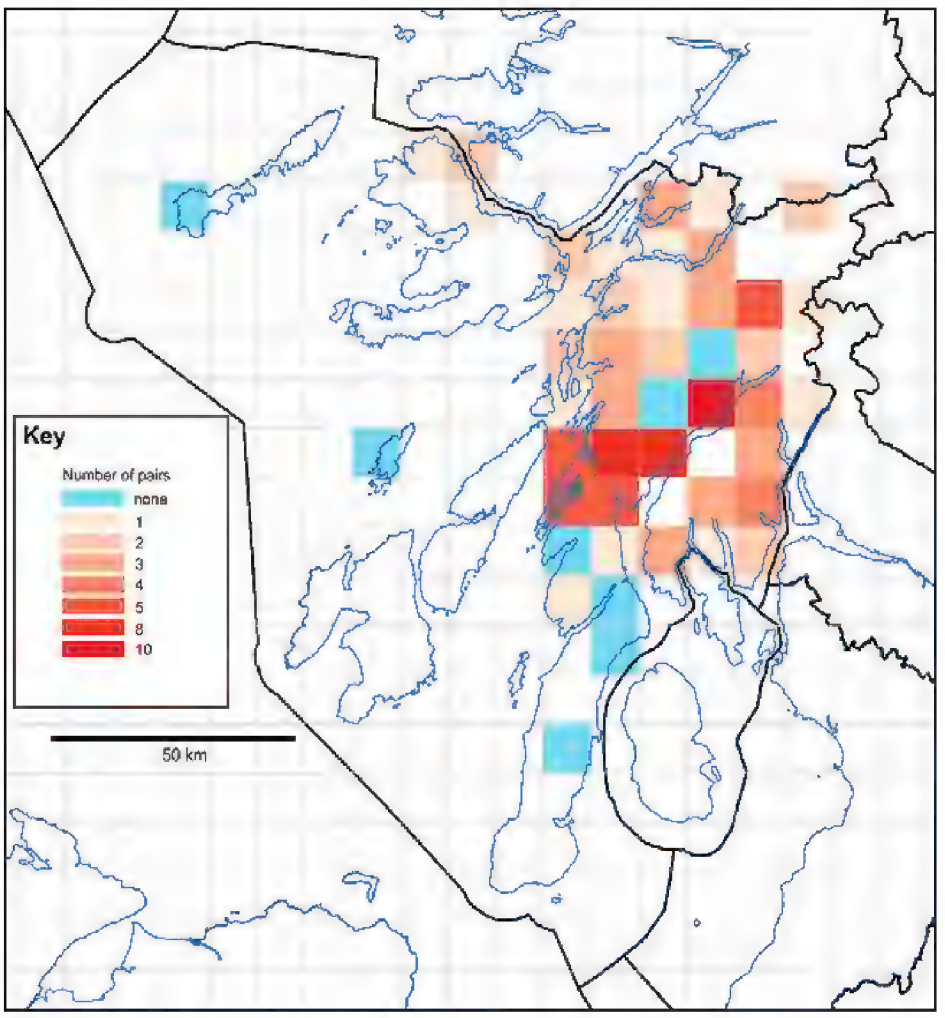

Figure 5. Distribution (and density) of Nuthatch records in Argyll, 2021 (ABC Nuthatch Survey).

Results

Participation was excellent with over 100 observers providing sightings; this is 2–3 times the participation in other recent ABC species surveys. Records were received from 46 10-km squares (of a total of 126 in Argyll) and 154 1-km squares. Nuthatches were found in 40 10-km squares (109 1-km squares) and negative reports were received from six 10-km squares (45 1-km squares). (Figure 5). Breeding was confirmed in nine locations.

Most of the occupied sites were on the lower ground along loch shores and close to habitation. At Inveraray, five singing males were found in a single 1-km square and two in the adjoining square. Elsewhere, most reports were of single males or pairs and occasionally these were in adjoining 1-km squares which may have resulted in the same pair being reported from two squares. Accounting for this, a minimum of 108 territories were reported during the survey, however, as no records were received from a number of areas where they had been reported previously, it is likely that the number of occupied territories in Argyll in 2021 was around 130–150 pairs.

Discussion

Publicity for the survey and the use of social media to garner sightings for this distinctive species proved highly effective with 171 reports of Nuthatch being received (c.f. 78 received in 2020) and from 109 1-km squares (c.f. 51 in 2020). However, coverage was not complete with no records received from eight 10-km squares in the core area where they have previously been found (NN01, 30, 33, NR77, 86, 98, NS09, 16) and one other 10-km square with suitable habitat in the core area (NM90). Whether these gaps are real, or a result of incomplete coverage is uncertain, but the numbers recently recorded in Glenfalloch (Cosgrove *et al.* 2021) suggest there is scope for considerable 'infilling'.

The 2021 ABC Survey has confirmed that the number of Nuthatches in Argyll (112–150 territories) is greater than previously reported: 20–50 pairs in 2018–19 (McMillan 2019). This increase (*c.* 275%)

is similar to that reported on the Glenfalloch estate (240%) between 2018 and 2021 (Cosgrove *et al.* 2021). It is clear that conditions in recent years on the west coast of Scotland have been very favourable for this species. While there is reasonably good evidence of colonisation of Highland through north Argyll (McMillan 2019), the historical analysis of records suggests that this was through the low-lying (coastal) woodlands rather through a more inland and upland route.

By 2021, Nuthatches were well established in Cowal, north Argyll and mid-Argyll and were establishing populations in north Kintyre and north Mull. They remain absent from south Kintyre, Islay, Jura, Colonsay, west Mull, Coll and Tiree. How much further they expand within Argyll remains to be seen, as suitable broadleaf habitat in south Kintyre is limited to relatively few sites mainly on the Clyde coast. There is some suitable woodland on the east coasts of Jura and Islay, around Bridgend (Islay) and Colonsay House; time will tell whether they become established in these outlying areas.

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Plate 89. It was difficult to determine the number of House Sparrows in dense hedges. The hedges by the Tesco car park and across the road at the bottom of the Doune Road were particularly problematic, December 2021. © *Mike Bell*

A survey of breeding House Sparrows and Tree Sparrows in Dunblane 2020

M.V. BELL & C.R. McKAY

A survey of the breeding population of sparrows in Dunblane in 2020 found 295–341 House Sparrow territories and 35–44 Tree Sparrow territories. The distribution of the two species across the town was very different. House Sparrows were mainly found in areas with denser housing and small gardens lacking large trees whereas Tree Sparrows were mainly round the periphery of the town with the largest concentrations where there were large gardens with mature trees. The results are discussed in relation to previous studies of the species and the implications for the conservation of urban populations of sparrows.

Introduction

There were large declines in the populations of House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* and Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* in Britain in the 20th century and both species are now Red-listed (Stanbury *et al.* 2021, *Birds of Conservation Concern 5*). In rural areas, increasing agricultural intensification, especially the use of herbicides (which reduced floral diversity and the availability of seeds), and pesticides (which greatly reduced the numbers of invertebrates required for feeding nestlings) are thought to have been responsible for the decline (Newton 2017). In urban/suburban areas, the decline has been spatially variable with some centres of large towns and cities suffering huge declines, while in others, populations have remained stable or even increased (De Laet *et al.* 2011). A number of reasons have been suggested for these declines including a reduction in availability of favoured food for adults and/or chicks, increased levels of pollution, particularly lead in petrol, loss of suitable nest sites, increased prevalence of disease and increased levels of predation from domestic cats and Sparrowhawks *Accipiter nisus* (Summers-Smith 2003). Peach *et al.* (2018) found that supplementary feeding during the breeding season plus unlimited high-energy seed year-round had no impact on overwinter survival or population size in 33 sparrow colonies across suburban London. House Sparrows were found to be more abundant, or showed more positive temporal changes in abundance, at localities containing large areas of seed-rich habitat and low levels of nitrogen dioxide air pollution.

In Scotland, there has been a range contraction eastwards due to abandonment of dwellings in some upland glens and also a reduction in growing cereals in many western areas (Forrester *et al.* 2007). However, the most recent Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) trends are more positive for both species with increasing populations in Scotland over the 22-year period from 1995 to 2017 of 46% and 389% for House Sparrow and Tree Sparrow respectively (Harris *et al.* 2019). It is unclear what factors have contributed to this increase. There has been a large increase in the number of people feeding birds in their gardens, which could have aided a recovery in numbers in the urban environment (Plummer *et al.* 2019). The situation in the wider countryside is less clear. Some farmers and landowners are managing their ground in a more sustainable manner but within a 30 km radius of Dunblane several farms which supported good populations of several red-listed farmland birds have moved from a spring ploughing/sowing to autumn sowing arable regime. Within the last ten years, and as recently as 2020 one farmer was removing hedges while many hedgerows which were formerly important for wildlife are flailed annually, severely damaging their value to farmland birds (MVB pers. obs.). There have been a number of government-funded grants available to farmers in recent years to try and reverse the declines of farmland birds. Some studies have found that Tree Sparrows respond to the seed-rich winter habitats provided through agri-environment schemes (e.g. Baker *et al.* 2021) but not all studies found this effect (e.g. Daskalova *et al.* 2019). Despite the potential benefits of agri-environment schemes the recovery in the Tree Sparrow population seems very large to be explained solely by this mechanism.

Dunblane is a town in central Scotland which lies just north of the Central Belt in a mostly rural setting. It has expanded greatly over the last 150 years or so. The original old town, comprising mostly terraced houses, was close to the river and cathedral. There was an expansion in Victorian times, especially following the arrival of the railway, with many wealthy businessmen from Edinburgh and Glasgow building large houses with large grounds, especially on the east side of the town south of the present Dunblane Hydro, and along the Doune Road on the west side of the town. There was a second large increase in housing from the late 1960s, with estates built on the west and east sides of the town. Since then, smaller estates have been added at intervals, mostly around the periphery of the town but with some infilling in the grounds of large houses. Most of the housing comprises detached or semi-detached properties of varying sizes, many with gardens and hedges, shrubs and ornamental conifers such as Leyland Cypress *Cupressus* x *leylandii*. There is therefore a wide variety of buildings and gardens in the town potentially available for sparrows to exploit.

Casual observations over the last 30 years suggested that a healthy population of House Sparrows is present in the town, whilst small numbers of Tree Sparrows utilised garden bird feeders and were known to nest in boxes in some gardens (MVB pers. obs.). Tree Sparrows were also present in the farmland bordering the town, especially on the west side towards Doune, where there are still spring sown arable crops with autumn stubbles, and some pasture with both sheep and cattle. The objective of this survey was to map the breeding distribution of both species in the town and obtain an estimate of numbers using standard survey methods.

Methods

Methods followed those described by Shaw *et al.* (2011) for surveying House Sparrows in urban environments. This used 500 m x 500 m Ordnance Survey grid squares (hereafter "500 m squares") with all streets and boundaries of green space backing onto houses walked twice at least a week apart in the first two hours after sunrise during the spring. We found sparrows would remain active to at least 11:00 hrs on calm sunny mornings. There was much less activity on cold, overcast or breezy (force 4 or more) mornings, so visits in the two hours after sunrise as described by Shaw *et al.* (2011) were often not optimal in this location. Fortunately, the weather during spring 2020 was good with many dry sunny mornings enabling all areas to be visited in favourable conditions. All streets and paths were surveyed at least twice from late March to the first week of May. Each 500 m square

comprised up to 4.5 km of streets and paths, and it is estimated that over 44 km was walked for each survey. The dense road network meant that good coverage of the whole town was achieved, and the relatively small size of most gardens meant that sparrows could be seen or heard chirping in many of the back gardens. Due to access restrictions, the Queen Victoria School on the northern edge of the town was not surveyed but no sparrows were seen or heard in adjacent areas, and we have assumed that birds were absent here. The two figures presenting the results show the extent of the built-up area and road network within the town apart from the Queen Victoria School and Duthieston House at the north end of the town where no sparrows were recorded. Some additional focused visits were made to areas with large numbers of House Sparrows to better determine their numbers, although this could still prove difficult. Second survey visits showed that many Tree Sparrows were not present on the first visit, so some later visits were made in May to these areas to confirm their status. In the south-east of the town where most of the Tree Sparrows were found some of these territories were not confirmed until the birds were feeding young in June. This area was close to the home of MVB and was walked at least weekly throughout late March to early June.

Local birdwatchers were contacted directly and information about the survey was put on the Dunblane Wildlife Facebook page. All sightings of sparrows were recorded with particular emphasis on chirping (singing) territorial males and pairs. No specific attempt was made to find nests although nest locations were recorded when found. A minimum and maximum number of territorial males was recorded for each location. These were often the same, but where birds were in dense hedges or bushes or different visits recorded different numbers the maximum number was used. Observations were recorded either directly onto mobile phones, marked on hard copy maps or in notebooks by street, house number or name, then the eight or ten figure grid reference obtained later using a mapping programme. All observations were entered onto a spreadsheet to compile a database of territories.

House Sparrows were easily detected. On calm mornings chirping sparrows could be heard from at least 100 m away, the lack of traffic noise due to the COVID-19 travel restrictions helping detection, though it was not always possible to determine the exact location of singing birds in back gardens. Territorial males frequently chirped from house roovs or gutters, often by the nest hole, or in nearby dense hedges or bushes. In areas with a high density of House Sparrows it was not always possible to allocate all the males to a particular house or site. No attempt was made to distinguish adult males from first summer males and some of the birds that remained in small flocks at the end of April may have been non-territorial first summer birds. The difference between the minimum and maximum estimates largely concerned sites where there were small flocks in dense cover or where there was a territorial male seen on only one visit. It is probable that the maximum figure has underestimated numbers at sites where small flocks were present in dense cover.

Results

A minimum of 295 and a maximum of 341 House Sparrow territories were found with their distribution across the town shown in Figure 1. The estimated number of territories per 100 m x 100 m square ("100 m square" (1 ha)) is also shown. The west side of the town was almost one continuous colony of House Sparrows while the distribution on the east side was much patchier. There were small numbers in the old town, but the largest numbers were in the housing estates built in the 1960s to 1980s. There was a large gap in the south-east of the town where old houses with large mature gardens dominate. The figures also show the extent of greenspace within the town. House Sparrows were present in 132 100 m squares (20 500 m squares). The highest densities were 11–12 territories in 100 m square NN775007 and 60–70 territories in 500 m square NN7700NE. The highest density of territories in NN7700NE would extrapolate to a density of 240–280 territories per km^2 while the average density across the 132 100 m squares with House Sparrows present was 260 territories per km^2. The whole area of Dunblane was estimated to cover approximately 350 ha or 3.5 km^2 giving an average density across the whole town of approximately 100 territories per km^2.

A total of 35 to 44 Tree Sparrow territories was found in 30 of the 100 m squares, the distribution and number of territories per ha are shown in Figure 2. Most were around the periphery of the town with concentrations in the south-east and north-east, with isolated pairs scattered within the town.

Discussion

House Sparrow

The average density of House Sparrows in the 1 ha squares holding this species was 260 territories per km^2 and across the whole town was 100 territories per km^2. These figures are lower than those found in studies in Europe carried out before the 1980s. In these, densities for six studies in residential areas with survey areas greater than 50 ha ranged from 730–1,080 breeding birds per km^2 (Cramp & Perrins 1994).

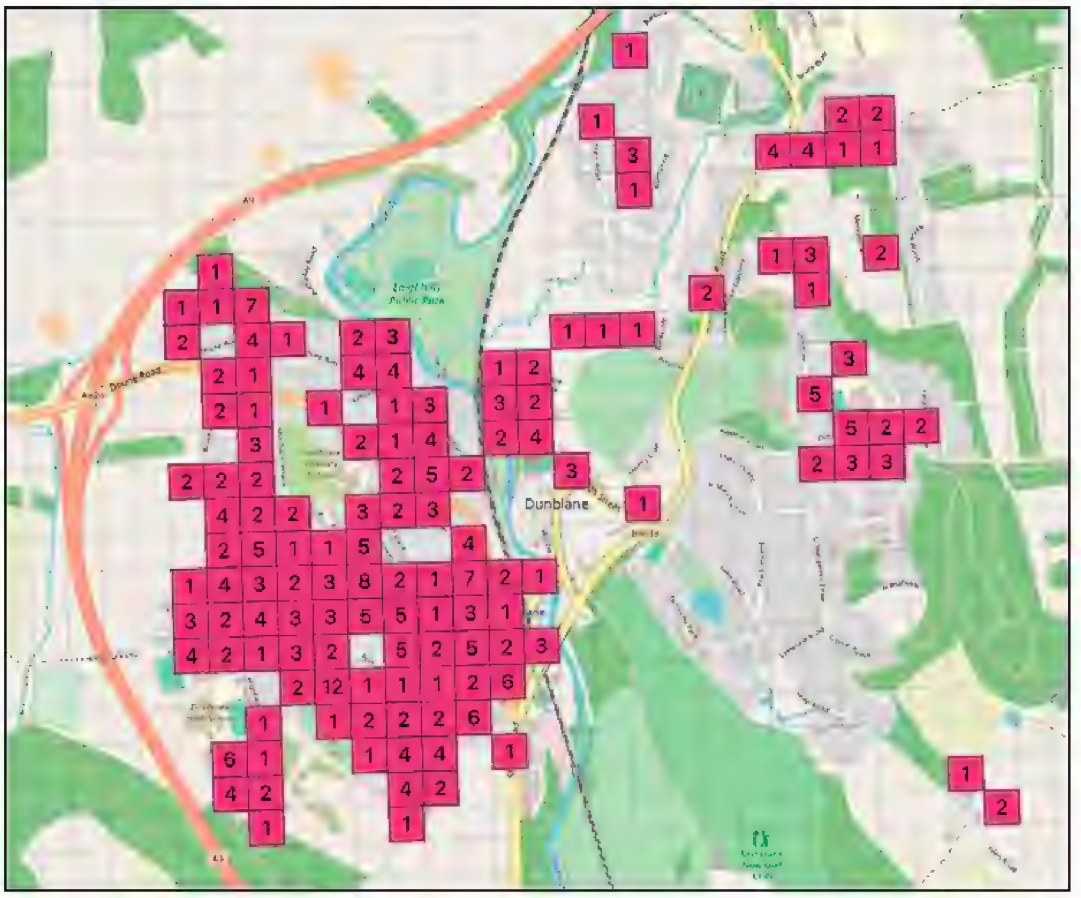

Figure 1. The distribution of House Sparrow territories in Dunblane. The maximum number of territories per ha (100 x 100 m square) is shown. Built up areas area are shown in grey, open greenspace in light green, the golf course in intermediate green and woodland in dark green.

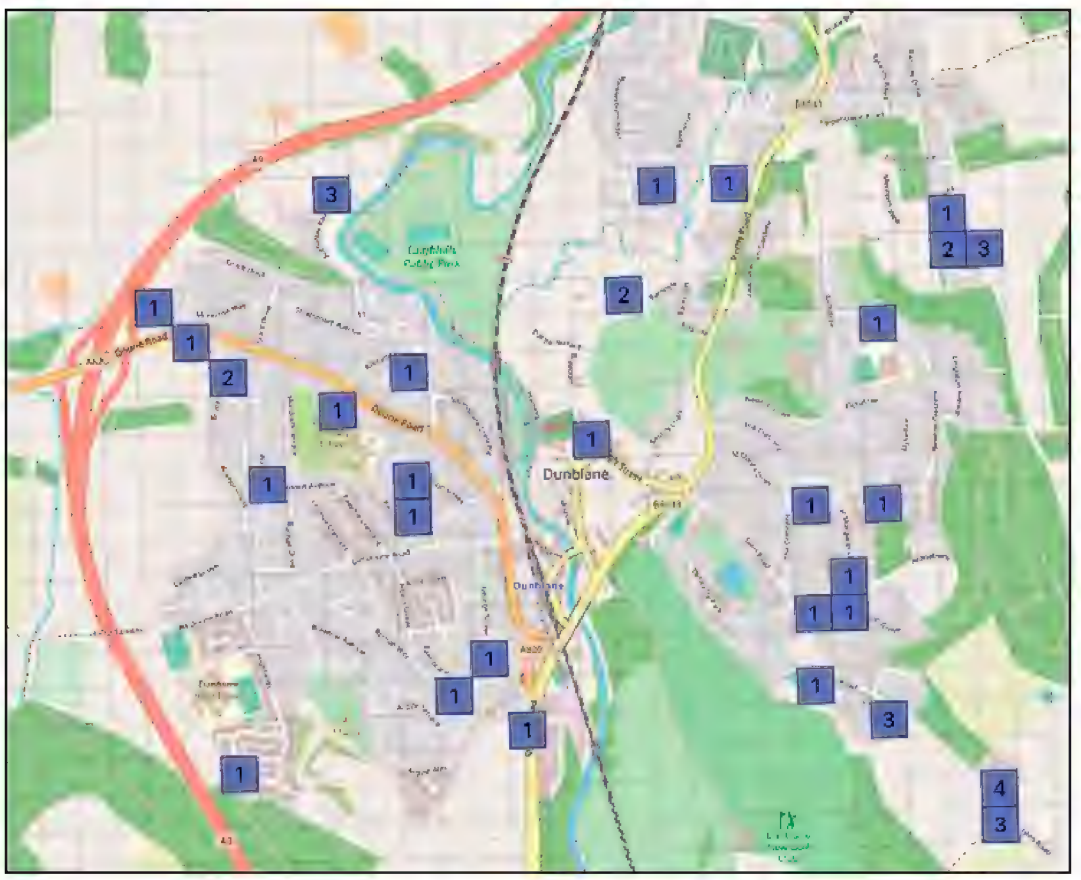

Figure 2. The distribution of Tree Sparrow territories in Dunblane. The maximum number of territories per ha (100 x 100 m square) is shown.

A characteristic of most territories was that there was dense cover nearby that birds could escape to if threatened. Such sites were often also used by small flocks during the winter (pers. obs.). Beech hedges were a particular favourite and others included hawthorn and cotoneaster hedging, thickets of dogwood and ivy-covered walls. It appeared that the birds could easily see out of these sites whilst providing dense enough cover for the sparrows to feel secure when people walked past just a metre or so away. A good example was the hedging in the car park of the local Tesco in the centre of town on Springfield Terrace (Plate 89) where the noisy flock of sparrows was difficult to count. Dense conifers were rarely used as cover, though mature *Leylandii* cypress hedges which had been cut off exposing the open interior sometimes were. Dense shrubs and hedges also presumably provide some protection from Sparrowhawks *Accipiter nisus* several pairs of which breed close to the town. Hunting Sparrowhawks are a frequent sight in the town, and sparrows feature regularly at plucking posts (CM pers. obs.).

In the breeding season, adult House Sparrows forage predominantly within just 70 m of their nest site (Vincent 2005, Peach *et al.* 2008). A radio tracking study in Bristol found that the home range of foraging birds in the breeding season was approximately 800 m^2, with the core of the home range covering as little as 100 m^2 (Shaw 2009). The close proximity of nest sites to suitable foraging areas is vital for successful breeding. Such foraging areas in Dunblane included amenity grasslands at Braemar Park and a pasture field at Hillside, where House Sparrows were observed foraging in small flocks, often comprising females provisioning young,

On older houses, most of the nest sites used by House Sparrows were under the gable end eaves of either the main roof or dormer roofs. The corrugated cement roof tiles used on many of the more modern houses built from the late 1960s to the 1980s enabled good access to the roof space along the gutter line, particularly at the gutter end, along valleys, under the gable end ridge tile and where drainage breather pipes exited the roof. Cement roof tiles eventually deteriorate and become porous and a few houses have already had tiles replaced with non-corrugated tiles. Property maintenance in the form of replacing soffits and bargeboards, repointing and replacing roofs represents a significant threat to the House Sparrow population by reducing availability of nest-sites. It is possible that the availability of nest sites was limiting in some of the new housing estates with a different type of roof tile. It is likely that some House Sparrows were nesting in dense hedges or shrubs. One observer (D. Kerr, pers.com.) had previously recorded a House Sparrow nest built in an old Blackbird nest in a hedge by adding a dome to it, and the species is known to nest in trees occasionally (Cramp & Perrins 1994).

Although nest-site competition with Swifts was not observed, it is likely to occur. Both species used very similar nest-sites, sometimes in the same buildings. There were two known cases of House Sparrows using Swift nest boxes, although not in boxes known to have been used by nesting Swifts. It is possible that competition is reduced by the Swift's later breeding season. Swifts were observed "buzzing" House Sparrow and Tree Sparrow nests in buildings, and it is possible that nesting sparrows provide cues for nest-prospecting Swifts. A building with six active Swift nests was much-frequented by House Sparrows which were seen prospecting the same nest holes, but it appeared that the Swifts were dominant.

Many houses had bird feeders visible in the garden, and other houses probably had feeders at the back which could not be seen from the roads. So there were plenty of feeding opportunities in gardens. However, it was not clear to what extent supplementary feeding was continued through the summer months. Previous studies have shown that the presence of allotments is an important feature for House Sparrows in urban environments (Chamberlain *et al.* 2007). In Dunblane, there is only one small area of allotments in the centre of the town surrounded by houses with gardens or open greenspace and the allotments are unlikely therefore to have impacted sparrow numbers.

The largest negative determinant of House Sparrow distribution in Dunblane was thought to be the presence of large mature trees and shrubs in large gardens (and therefore low housing density) though this wasn't tested statistically. The areas on the east side of the town holding House Sparrows, and most of the areas on the west side, comprised houses with smaller gardens, small shrubs and few mature trees. The parts of the town around Dunblane Hydro and in the south-east quarter which held no House Sparrows resemble woodland with many mature trees and shrubs in the grounds and gardens making these areas less attractive to a species that favours more open landscapes. House Sparrows are gregarious and the lower density of housing may have resulted in fewer potential nest holes so that the loose colonies of nesting birds which stimulate breeding were not possible. A study in the small town of Guisborough, Cleveland in 2006–08 also found that in residential suburban areas with older houses and 90% green cover there were no House Sparrows in contrast, to the parts of the town that had much smaller proportions of green cover (De Laet *et al.* 2011).

Tree Sparrow

This study found a density of 12.5 pairs of Tree Sparrows per km^2 across the whole town which is within the range found in studies across Europe (Cramp & Perrins 1994). Many of the published studies involved much smaller study areas than Dunblane giving higher densities. Tree Sparrow populations respond readily to the provision of nest boxes when they may nest colonially at very high densities, with figures up to 3,900 pairs per km^2 given in Birds of the Western Palearctic (Cramp & Perrins 1994). Most Tree Sparrow sites had access to green space whether that was surrounding farmland, large gardens or parks, playing fields or other greenspace within the town. Of the 18 nest sites identified, nine were in buildings, three in nest boxes, two in natural tree holes and four in dense hedges or shrubs.

Tree Sparrows were often harder to detect than the House Sparrows being less likely to sing from prominent perches and more likely to be in thick cover. In contrast to House Sparrow, the largest grouping was in large mature gardens with big trees and a lot of cover in the south-east part of the town. Tree Sparrows were also seen flying a considerable distance to favoured feeding areas, sometimes over 400 m. Nesting was several weeks later than for House Sparrow and one garden feeder held a small flock of up to 11 birds at the end of April. Given the difficulties of detecting Tree Sparrows in large mature gardens it is likely that the our maximum estimate of 44 territories is low.

This study has provided baseline information on the numbers and distribution of House Sparrows and Tree Sparrows breeding in Dunblane. Most national and regional atlases of breeding birds are carried out using either 10 x 10 km squares (100 km^2) or tetrads (4 km^2). These surveys are unable to detect the large changes in density across small areas that occur with a semi-colonial species like the House Sparrow, making it hard to interpret the causes of declines or increases. The 1 ha grid used in this survey has shown the patchy nature of the distribution across Dunblane and provides a higher resolution baseline for interpreting future changes in numbers. The future will certainly bring changes. Housing maintenance may remove nest sites so that these become limiting. However, this could be offset by providing nest boxes with the appropriately sized holes. The move to electric or hydrogen powered vehicles will lead to a cleaner environment benefiting all wildlife though quieter vehicles might lead to more traffic fatalities. The changing climate is likely to lead to a different range of plant species in gardens and greenspaces which could impact the availability of natural food. It would be useful to have more studies of this type in other urban areas to give a larger dataset which could be used to examine fine scale changes in the parameters affecting sparrow populations.

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Hybrid Black Grouse x Capercaillie (Rackelhahn) at a Black Grouse lek in mid-Deeside, North-East Scotland

Hybrids between male Black Grouse *Lyurus tetrix* and female Capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus* have been known to European naturalists from as long ago as Linnaeus in the 18th century and occurred frequently enough to acquire their own name of Rackelhahn (Appleton 2014, Shuker 2014). They are said to have occurred frequently in Scotland in the 19th century, following the reintroduction of Capercaillie, as females dispersed into new areas more quickly than males and could only find male Black Grouse to mate with (Watson & Moss 2008). However, there have been few records in recent decades, with the most recent being recorded at Mar Lodge (North-East Scotland) and Glen Finglas (Upper Forth) in 2001 (Online Scottish Bird Report).

On 12 April 2021, I visited a Black Grouse lek in mid-Deeside, North-East Scotland, that has been regularly monitored since 2003. The lek held up to seven males in the early 2000s, increasing to 19 males in 2011 (after the long, cold winter of 2009–10). Since 2014, the lek has held between 2–6 males.

Scanning the lek from a vantage point 700 m away just before 06:00 hrs, only a single bird could be seen. The bird soon started to display, and the possibility that it was a hybrid quickly became apparent. At rest, the bird was indistinguishable from a Black Grouse at that distance, having a dark bill and wholly black-looking plumage lacking the slate grey shades of a Capercaillie. However, in display it took on the appearance of a Capercaillie with a rounded, fanned tail held upright, although the tail was shorter relative to its body size compared with a Capercaillie; it lacked any obvious white marks and there was a slight outward curve to the outer tail feathers. No white undertail feathers, a prominent feature of male Black Grouse, could be seen. The bird's head and neck were also held vertically, with the bill pointing upwards in the manner of a Capercaillie as it walked around slowly.

I returned to the lek at 06:00 hrs on 14 April, and found the bird in roughly the same place, and managed to approach to within about 400 m. The bird showed very little activity until about 06:30 hrs, when two male Black Grouse flew onto a grassy patch about 100 m uphill and started to display to each other. The reaction from the hybrid to the sound of the displaying Black Grouse was immediate. He fanned his tail and ran up the slope towards the two new arrivals, chasing each one in turn and causing them to fly off the lek less than five minutes after their arrival. During this interaction it was apparent that the hybrid was significantly larger than the Black Grouse, something which hadn't been apparent when seeing the bird on its own. It also raised its neck feathers in the manner of a Capercaillie as it approached the Black Grouse. The aggression of Rackelhahns towards male Black Grouse at leks is well documented, with records of them even killing Black Grouse (Andersen 2015).

I contacted Harry Scott with a view to getting better photographs of the bird and he observed the lek from a hide on the morning of 26 April

Plate 90. Composite image of two video stills showing the Rackelhahn and two male Black Grouse at a similar distance to illustrate the size difference, mid-Deeside, North-East Scotland, 14 April 2021. © *Paul Chapman*

Plate 91. Rackelhahn, mid-Deeside, North-East Scotland, 26 April 2021. © *Harry Scott*

2021. From about 04:00 hrs, still in almost complete darkness, approximately six male Black Grouse could be heard displaying from widely scattered locations around the lek, including one right in front of the hide. At this time, a quieter low, guttural croaking call could also be heard and was presumed to come from the hybrid. At about 04:50 hrs the hybrid was seen challenging and flushing the Black Grouse in front of the hide before moving uphill towards other displaying Black Grouse. Some photographs were taken in very low light conditions which showed that the hybrid had a faint white wing bar, but unfortunately it flew off the lek at 04:54 hrs along with two Black Grouse and did not return. Subsequent cold, wet weather at the end of April and early May prevented further attempts to photograph the bird that year.

Female Capercaillie have been seen relatively frequently within 1–2 km of this Black Grouse lek in recent years, so it is easy to see how hybridisation arose. However, there is also an active Capercaillie lek only 1.5 km away which still held two males in 2021, so the option of mating with a male Capercaillie has not been lost in this area. The Capercaillie lek held eight males in 2006 and five males as recently as 2011 but has usually had only single males present since 2016, so perhaps this has limited mating opportunities sufficiently for hybridisation to occur. Female Black Grouse are not thought to solicit copulations from hybrids, but female Capercaillie do so (Porkert *et al.* 1997) and there is evidence that such backcrossing can result in second and third generation hybrids (Kleven *et al.* 2020). Consequently, while the Rackelhahn is an interesting and unusual bird to see, there must be some concern both in terms of how it may reflect the precarious status of Capercaillie in Deeside and also about its potential impact on this critically low population should it breed successfully with female Capercaillie.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Harry Scott for the details of his observations of the bird and for his comments on the first draft of this note. I am also grateful to the land managers of the lek site for their support, although I have not named them to avoid disclosing information that might identify the site location.

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Plate 92. The spacious venue, Elgin Town Hall, 19 March 2022. © *Ian Francis*

BTO/SOC Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference, Elgin, 19 March 2022

There was a real air of rejuvenation on the morning of 19 March. The sun shone on Elgin, the local gulls were getting down to the serious business of establishing themselves on their rooftop territories, and, at last, we were getting together to talk birds. The theme of this year's event was northern coasts and seas, and Elgin Town Hall felt like a perfect location, with the speakers competing with the Herring, Common, and first-returning Lesser Black-backed Gulls outside. This was partly because the windows and doors were wide open, as if the audience of 120 masked faces wasn't enough to remind us that although we were heading in the right direction, life wasn't quite back to normal just yet.

Adding to the feeling of renewal, we were delighted to welcome, and indeed be welcomed by, Ruth Briggs, SOC's new president. Opening conference was Ruth's first official duty as SOC president, on behalf of the host SOC branch, Moray Bird Club, and BTO Scotland. This was closely followed by her second presidential task - chairing the first session of talks, with Colin Moffat leading the way and setting the scene. Colin's frank and realistic message was delivered with enough energy and enthusiasm to keep us going all day. And it did!

Plate 93. Ruth Briggs. © *Richard Somers Cocks*

The marine environment: setting the scene

Colin Moffat - Visiting Professor, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen

The ocean is essential for life on Earth, including for humans and birds. It provides us with oxygen, food, medicines and energy (renewable and hydrocarbon-based). The ocean transfers heat and nutrients around the globe and influences our climate. Finally, we all benefit from a visit to the coast, whether for exercise or

Plate 94. Colin Moffat. © *Richard Somers Cocks*

simply to soak up the mystery of our seas. However, the ocean has absorbed about 90% of the excess heat resulting from the increased atmospheric concentration of greenhouse gases as well as taking up about a quarter of the anthropogenic carbon dioxide emissions. We have overfished many areas and used the sea as a dumping ground. Many synthetic chemicals and plastics find their way ultimately to the sea. These multiple outcomes of human activity have consequences for the ocean and its biodiversity. Although action is being taken, further activity is essential to avoid the ocean passing through possibly irreversible tipping points. There is an increasingly clear picture concerning the human impacts and how they might be tackled, but as plans to use the sea to generate a greater proportion of our energy are enacted, there will be consequences - both positive and negative. Urgent, evidence-based decisions are required to ensure that the ocean continues to be biologically diverse while also delivering the ecosystem services on which humans and wildlife are dependent.

Colin's presentation was followed by **Liz Humphreys, Principal Ecologist: Seabirds, BTO Scotland**, who spoke on **'Tracking Arctic Skuas in northern seas: Where do they go to feed?'**. After this, came talks concentrating on local wader species from Bob Swann and Ron Summers.

Curlew studies on Moray Firth

Bob Swann - Highland Ringing Group

Highland Ringing Group (HRG) has been studying Curlew on the Moray Firth since the late 1970s. During that period, counts indicate that around 3,500 winter, with concentrations in the larger estuarine bays. Over this period, numbers have remained fairly stable. This is surprising, given that in Scotland as a whole numbers increased to a peak in the year 2000 and have since started to decline. Analysis of HRG survival data by BTO shows that the annual overwinter survival of Moray Firth birds has tended to remain high (average 0.88), only being reduced by severe winter weather.

Results from metal ring recoveries, geolocator studies, and satellite tracking show that Curlew wintering on the Moray Firth come mainly from Fennoscandia, but that about a quarter are Scottish breeders. Birds depart in mid-March and the first birds are back by late June, so that they can spend up to 80% of their year on the Moray Firth.

During the winter many birds occupy discrete territories on the firths, which they return to each winter. There are some sex differences in distribution, with the longer-billed females tending to dominate in muddy bays, whilst the shorter-billed males dominate in areas close to grasslands.

The percentage of young Curlew found on the Moray Firth is worrying low, and has significantly declined over the study period.

Plate 95. Bob Swann. © *Richard Somers Cocks*

Plate 96. Ron Summers. © *Richard Somers Cocks*

Plate 97. Martin Cook. © *Ian Francis*

The migrations of Greenshanks and Wood Sandpipers breeding in northern Scotland

Ron Summers - Highland Ringing Group

There are small breeding populations of Greenshanks and Wood Sandpipers in Scotland, at the western edge of extensive breeding ranges across the Palearctic. Both species spend the winter largely in the tropics, but the actual wintering areas of the Scottish breeding populations were unknown until studies were carried out by the Highland Ringing Group. Over the last ten years, breeding Greenshanks and Wood Sandpipers were fitted with geolocators to describe their migrations and establish the whereabouts of the wintering grounds. Greenshanks were found to winter largely in Ireland, but included Wales, England and France in the winter range, whereas Wood Sandpipers travelled to West Africa (Senegal). For the Wood Sandpipers, staging in southern Europe was carried out in this region before and after the flights across the western Sahara. Although the Greenshanks had a short migration, they too were found to stage for short periods. Full results of these studies have been published in *Bird Study* and *Wader Study* where more details can be found.

In the next talk, Martin Cook set out to promote the value of patch watching, in this case at a site that links the open sea to freshwater and the land - the estuary of the River Spey.

The Birdwatcher's Year in Spey Bay

Martin Cook - Moray SOC branch (Moray Bird Club)

The site benefits from a good range of habitats, including open mud, shingle bars and islands, saltmarsh, and reedbeds. Although bird numbers are limited by the relatively small size of the estuary, this is offset by the advantage that quite accurate counts are possible, even in a brief visit.

Martin went on to explain the changing bird life over the four main seasons of the year. Wildfowl and gulls are the main winter interest. In spring, a small wader passage peaks in May - and the return of fishing Ospreys is eagerly anticipated. Summer is busy with breeding terns and by July, return wader passage is under way. The mouth of the river holds a large moulting flock of Goosanders. Scarce passage waders are sought in autumn, and geese arrive off the sea, sometimes pausing their migration on the estuary in adverse weather.

As with any patch watching, the lure of the unexpected is ever present, but a greater reward is the anticipation of each event in the annual cycle - and the satisfaction of predictions coming true. In particular, developing an understanding of the origins and destinations of birds as they pass through, often pausing only briefly on the 'patch'. Seasonal changes, combined with daily change in tide and weather, guarantee that no two visits are the same.

Plate 98. Roy Dennis. © *Ian Francis*

Reminiscences of seabird work on Fair Isle

Roy Dennis - Roy Dennis Wildlife Foundation

Roy was assistant warden at the Fair Isle Bird Observatory in 1959, when they were based in the old wartime naval buildings. The warden was Peter Davis and a large part of the work was the recording and ringing of migratory birds - Roy mentioned a fall of 60,000 Redwing on one day. Rare birds were exciting, even if catching and ringing them was perhaps of little scientific value. Peter was working on Arctic Skuas (65 pairs on the island in those days) so Roy set out to count the other seabirds, that being the basis for long term studies.

Roy returned as warden in 1963 for seven years. The islanders were largely self-sufficient - for example, using Guillemot eggs for cooking, and catching and drying fish for the winter. The islanders were happy to take Roy out with them in their boats when checking lobster pots, for example, and there was an annual outing to climb the cliffs to Sheep Rock for the islanders to take off the lambs but which allowed the birdwatchers to gain access to ring Greater Black-backed Gulls.

Lots of seabirds were ringed including Puffins, Guillemots and Shags. Storm Petrels were, at first, mist netted on a headland and subsequently from a site half way down a cliff, but now they are caught outside the observatory using taped calls to attract them in. The 60s and 70s saw a rapid rise in seabird numbers, many of which were ringed, giving valuable long term data when they were re-caught many years later. White-tailed Eagles were reintroduced whilst he was there, although they failed to establish after that trial. The mid-1960s also saw large numbers of fishing boats hoovering up fish, especially herring and mackerel, from around the island before being loaded onto factory ships.

When he started, equipment was basic but a lot of the pioneering work was fun. Now, modern electronic gadgets mean that birds can be tracked remotely, but Roy emphasised that fieldwork is still important and must be long term. Roy ended with an update on the rebuild of the Fair Isle Bird Observatory, noting that it is due to re-open in 2023.

Rounding off the day came two talks highlighting the complex issues facing seabirds in today's often hostile marine environment.

Seabirds and plastics: a very topical subject

Nina O'Hanlon - Post-doctoral Research Associate, Environmental Research Institute, University of Highlands and Islands

With up to 12.7 million tonnes of plastic entering our oceans each year, which is predicted to increase, it is not surprising that seabirds encounter it. Over 56% of seabird species are documented to have interacted with anthropogenic debris, largely plastics, through ingestion and entanglement. A further interaction is the incorporation of plastics into the nests, which can cause an entanglement risk. Despite extensive media online showing shocking images of Gannets with nests full of colourful rope and netting, until recently there was very little quanti-

Plate 99. Nina O'Hanlon. © *Richard Somers Cocks*

tative data on the extent of this issue. Over the past five years, we collated data on nest incorporation of plastics, starting with Gannets, and expanding to other seabirds, thanks to numerous fantastic researchers, wardens, ringers and volunteers who checked nearly 20,000 nests of 15 species! Although there was a lot of variation between colonies and species, the highest number of nests containing plastics involved Gannets (46% of monitored nests), Herring Gulls (26%), and Shags (25%). And it's not just seabirds; collecting opportunistic records on www.birdsanddebris.com has also highlighted nest incorporation and entanglement involving raptors, passerines and waterbirds from over 35 countries globally. In addition to highlighting the extent of plastic pollution, such data will hopefully be valuable in assessing the effectiveness of policies and legislations to reduce plastic pollution, around banning single-use plastic items, working towards a circular economy, and vastly improving waste management facilities.

Overview of seabirds of the northern seas

Daisy Burnell - Seabirds Count Project Coordinator, JNCC

Britain and Ireland hold internationally important numbers of breeding seabirds every year. Annual data from the Seabird Monitoring Programme and results from periodic seabird censuses give us insight into how the different species are faring both in time and space. From the coasts of Banff and Buchan to the Highlands and up into the Northern Isles, the fates of seabirds are almost as diverse as the suite of species breeding there. A decline of 78% in breeding Kittiwake numbers has been noted in a colony on Shetland since Seabird 2000. Conversely, a new colony of Gannets in Orkney has climbed to over 1,300 pairs in only eight years.

Plate 100. Daisy Burnell. © *Ian Francis*

As with many aspects of conservation and ecology, the drivers for these changes are complex. Seabirds are dealing with pressures when they are at sea, as well as when they come to land for the breeding season. These pressures are likely interacting with one another and having varying degrees of impact depending on the site and species. There are, however, solutions and mitigation measures that can lessen the load for seabirds in the northern seas. Nevertheless, to show these initiatives are effective, and to keep track of the impacts different pressures are having on seabird populations, monitoring data is essential. Every piece of information helps to build our knowledge and informs decisions on how best to protect our charismatic marine life.

By the end of the talks, I'm sure we all knew a lot more about the challenges facing our sea and coastal birds, and what the next questions to answer might be. Do male and female Curlews have different habitat preferences due to bill length, or are differences in sex ratios due to different survival rates in the first year? What impacts have our disposable face masks had on breeding seabirds? The answers to these questions might be hard to find, but if this conference told us anything about them, it's that the seeds of the answers are in very good hands.

While the theme of the conference was northern seas and coasts, one message that was delivered loud and clear was the value of long term datasets. Colin Moffat talked of how monitoring in the marine environment needs to be increased to ensure that targets are met and safeguarding practices are effective. Daisy Burnell showed how data collected for the recent Seabirds Count census add to our knowledge of trends for seabirds throughout the country, with certain species populations doing better in some areas than others. At a more personal level, Martin Cook showed how data collected on his local patch over the years can

Plate 101. Settling in for the talks. © *Richard Somers Cocks*

Plate 102. Browsing the exhibitor stands. © *Richard Somers Cocks*

demonstrate how bird populations change over the seasons, and how collecting this data has helped develop such a close connection to Spey Bay. Perhaps most pertinently, Roy Dennis reflected on how the data he collected in his youth on Fair Isle are still used by researchers today, and the pride he takes from this. Hopefully these messages inspired those present to keep on recording, or record more.

All the speakers were excellent, and the organisers are to be commended for putting such a diverse and interesting programme together. They should also be thanked for persisting with making this conference happen as an in-person event, after two pandemic-thwarted attempts. A large and airy venue allowed delegates to either mingle or keep some social distance as they saw fit.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 saw to it that lunch couldn't be provided, but luckily it was a glorious day, and many made the most of this, taking their sandwiches in the sun. Special thanks should be given to Richard Somers Cocks, who stepped up to video the speakers at rather short notice. This means that those who signed up, but who were unable to attend on day, were at least able to see the talk recordings.

The conference raffle, organised by Moray Bird Club, managed to raise approximately £400 for the local group, thanks to the generosity of attendees and prize donors. The branch also organised a programme of great-looking outings, and hopefully all those who took part could make the most of the continuing fine weather and enjoy the wide variety of birds that this corner of Scotland has to offer.

Plate 103. Conference outing, Findhorn Bay, 20 March 2022. © *Richard Somers Cocks*

NEWS AND NOTICES

New members

Ayrshire: Mr R. Lambert, Mr C. Macqueen & Ms C. Mullor Navarro, **Borders:** Dr R. Crawley, Mr M. Harrop, Mrs J. McIntosh, Miss R. McLeod, Mr H. Sadler, **Central Scotland:** Miss H. Fraser, Mrs N. Glennie, Mr T. Mason, Mr W. McKechnie, Mrs K. Paul, Mr J. Robertson, **Clyde:** Mr J. Darbyshire, Mr & Mrs I. Darroch, Miss J. Ferguson, Ms J. Gardiner, Mr I. Haley, Mr A. Hall, Mr D. Hosie, Mrs A. Lilley, Mr T. Masterson & Ms E. Walls, Dr H. Mathers, Mr N. Metcalfe, Mr P. Nikolaou, Miss E. Stacey, Miss R. Stirling, Mr P. Tatner, Mr J.S. van der Walt, Ms A. Wood, Mr M. Wright, **Dumfries:** Miss H. Allinson, **England, Wales & NI:** Mr R. Ahmed, Mr W. Carter, Mr A. Hutt, Mr M. Jezierski, Mr J. Perry, Mr W. Smith, Mr E. Urquhart, **Fife:** Dr D. Balasubramaniam, Mr M. Jackson, **Highland:** Mr S. Dowds, Miss H. Page, Dr K. Reid, Mrs I. Young and family, **Lothian:** Mr & Mrs G. Andrew, Ms A. Balfour, Mr & Mrs C. Black, Mr G. Davidson, Mr K. Duncan, Ms T.R. Fricke, Mrs R. Godding, Mr J. Gordon & Ms H. McFarlane, Mr B. Henderson, Mr G.C. Hunter, Miss N. Imms, Miss J. Kevan, Mr & Mrs C. Kilmartin, Miss I. Lonero, Miss R. McGlynn, Ms L. O'Dowd, Miss H. Petrie, Miss L. Purbrick, Mr B. Samson, Mr T. Sheddan, Mrs S. Spencer, Mr M. Wilkie, Mrs R. Yule, **Moray:** Mr D. Slater, **North-East Scotland:** Dr H. Anderson, Dr J. Arthur, Ms R. Baillie, Mrs C. Dudley, Mr & Mrs M. Smith, **Orkney:** Mr S. Dudley, **Scotland - no branch:** Dr R. Riddington, **Stewartry:** Mr R. Bealby, **Tayside:** Mr A. Blair, Mr J. Christin, Mr R. Lawie, Mr A. Whyte.

SOC Annual Conference and AGM, 25–27 November 2022, Atholl Palace Hotel, Pitlochry

We look forward to proceeding with an in-person event in Pitlochry, as planned, and in accordance with any Scottish Government COVID-19 regulations that may be in place at the time. The theme of this year's event will be raptors, to coincide with the 20th anniversary of the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme. To reduce unnecessary printing costs, programme and booking information will be circulated by email to members on our Club News mailing list (www.the-soc.org.uk/gdpr-consent). If you plan to attend the conference but do not have internet access and require a paper booking form, please contact the office on 01875 871330.

Waterston House update

Summer opening hours: Wednesday - Sunday 10:00–17:00 hrs

Please check the SOC website for any updates to opening hours and facilities available when planning your visit: www.the-soc.org.uk/about-us/getting-here-opening-hours. Admin staff can be reached Monday to Friday 09:00–17:00 hrs and weekend staff 10:00–17:00 hrs on 01875 871330.

Art Exhibitions

Two exhibitions run concurrently in the corridor and gallery in June/July, both highlighting printmaking and poetry inspired by nature.

Birds, Botany and John Clare 8 June–31 July. Established wildlife artist Carry Akroyd has long admired the poetry of John Clare (1793–1864). The core of this exhibition in the gallery is a suite of 16 hand-drawn lithographs that incorporate extracts from his poems, while the full text of the poems will be displayed alongside the prints. Although so much of the rural landscape familiar to Clare has changed, his observations and concerns still speak to us 200 years on. Carry lives in Northamptonshire and draws inspiration from the farmed landscape around her, where wildlife survives mostly on the edges. Her work, as a painter and printmaker, is characterised by a bold palette and a strong sense of composition.

Plate 104. Swifts. © *Carry Akroyd*

Plate 105. Wren. © *K.A. Brown*

Nature Prints & Poetry 8 June–31 July. Running alongside Carry's exhibition, this smaller show in the corridor presents wood engravings by members of the Society of Wood Engravers (SWE) together with the poems that inspired them. Wood engraving was traditionally used to illustrate books, with Thomas Bewick developing the use of this technique in the late 18th century. Today, it continues to be used by artists who value the fine detail and wide tonal range it offers. The results are intense prints that encapsulate a whole world, despite their often diminutive size.

What It's Like To Be a Bird 3 August–25 September. Catherine Rayner is an award-winning author and illustrator based in Edinburgh. She has written over 20 books for children, as well as illustrating other well-known authors. In 2021, she illustrated Tim Birkhead's words for a book aimed at a young audience, *What It's Like to Be a Bird*. The core of this exhibition relates to this project. As Catherine explains: *"When I am working on a book, I often make large paintings of the subjects or characters in the story, because working exclusively within the size of a page can feel restrictive. In addition, knowing that this exhibition was in the diary opened the possibility that each page might exist outside of the book, extending into the exhibition space. Some of the paintings on show are the original illustrations from the book while others are inspired by the words of Tim Birkhead and my own new-found fascination for the spellbinding world of birds".*

Plate 106. Macaws. © *Catherine Rayner*

Art on the website The SOC Online Art Shop presents an ever-changing selection of unframed works such as drawings, prints and watercolours by our regular exhibitors, some of the best wildlife artists in the UK: www.the-soc.org.uk/online-shop

Branch Updates

New contacts Borders, change of Chair: Dr Gavin Paterson, Email: gavin.paterson@hotmail.co.uk

Council thanks outing Chair, Martin Moncrieff, for his time and work heading up the branch over the past three years. Sincere thanks also to long-serving committee members, Malcolm Ross and David Parkinson, who have stood down.

Other changes to local contacts following the branch AGMs held in April will be announced in the September issue and can also be found by visiting the Local Branches page of the SOC website.

Appeal for Speakers The winter programme of talks across the branches is an important element of SOC membership. We would love to hear from any members who are knowledgeable and passionate about a bird-related topic who would be willing to give an illustrated talk to members at one (or more) of the local groups in the SOC branches network. Almost anything with a Scottish flavour goes - from being an expert in a particular species or having a good conservation story to tell, to being engaged in educating or communicating birding skills to others or involved in a research project. Or perhaps you have a specialist knowledge of a particular site? From this autumn, work will begin on pulling together the programme for the 2023 session (January–April) and we will be looking to fill slots in the Zoom programme as well as booking speakers to give in-person presentations, as many branches resume their indoor meetings. If you have a talk, or have an idea for one, please contact Kathryn Cox by email: admin@the-soc.org.uk or call 01875 871330.

Latest Local Bird Reports

***Fife Bird Report* 2017 (Digital)** For access to this latest report and recent years' issues, contact chairman@fifebirdclub.org.uk

***Arran Bird Report* 2021** The report is available from various outlets on Arran; please see the Arran Birding website for further details. It is also available directly from the distribution organisers for the Arran Natural History Society (ANHS), priced £9.99 plus £1.70 p&p.

Email arrannaturalhistorysociety@gmail.com or write to Kate Sampson, ANHS, Arran Ranger Service, Brodick Country Park, Isle of Arran KA27 8HQ.

***Ayrshire Bird Report* 2017** The latest report, which includes summaries of species such as Kestrel, Barn Owl and Lesser Whitethroat, is available to view or download (free) from the Ayrshire Birding website: www.ayrshire-birding.org.uk. The editors, Angus Hogg and Dave Grant, are in the process of collating the 2018 report in an effort to bring the annual publication up to date.

***North-East Scotland Bird Report* 2020** Copies are available at a cost of £12.00 incl p&p by visiting the *North-East Scotland Bird Report* website or by emailing Ian Middleton: admin@nescotlandbirdreport.org.uk or calling Ian on 07882 411469. Copies can also be purchased in person at Waterston House, priced at £13.00 (please check availability before travelling - Tel: 01875 871330).

Other Local Bird Report news

New *Orkney Bird Report* editor: Andy Mitchell, Email: orkneybirdreport@hestily.co.uk Andy takes up the reins from long-serving report editor, Jim Williams.

New *Borders Bird Report* editor: Richard Jackson. Richard takes over from Tom Brewis.

Council thanks outgoing editors, Jim and Tom, for their hard work pulling together the reports over the years - no small task!

For the complete list of local bird reports available and details of how to purchase or access the latest as well as back issues, visit the Bird Reports page of the SOC Website (Bird Recording/Bird Reports and atlases)

2022 research and survey grants

Table 1. The research and survey grants awarded from the SOC Endowment Fund for the 2022/23 period.

Project Title (Applicant)
Shillay (Monach Islands) European Storm Petrel survey (Shiants Auk Ringing Group)
Recording the acoustic diversity of the Scottish island wrens (Michal Jezierski)
Evaluation and development of the last known remaining Tree Sparrow colony in East Renfrewshire (Kevin Sinclair)
SOC Borders Nightjar Survey (SOC Borders Branch)
Quandale Skua study, Orkney (Helen and David Aiton)
Breeding biology and migrations of Green and Wood Sandpipers in Highland (Brian Etheridge and Ron Summers)

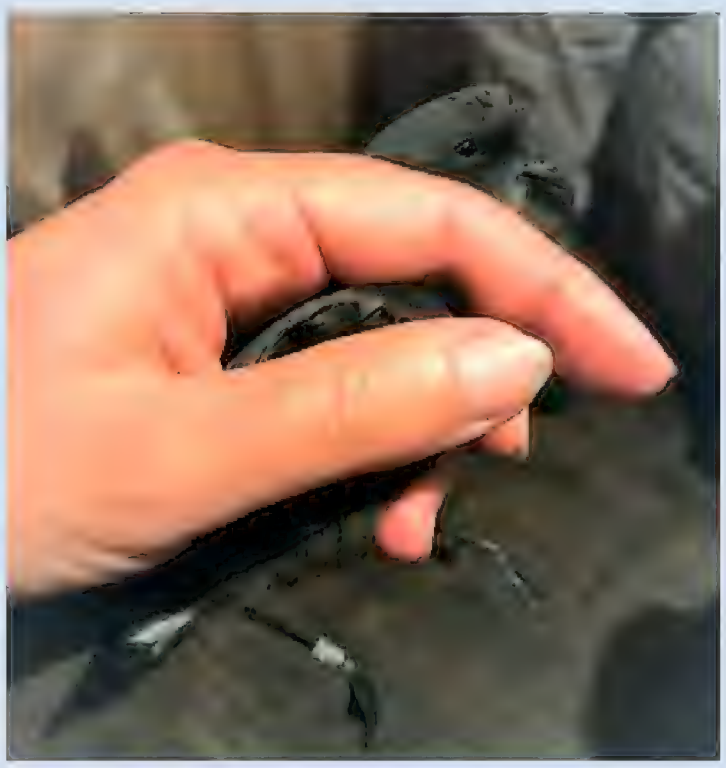
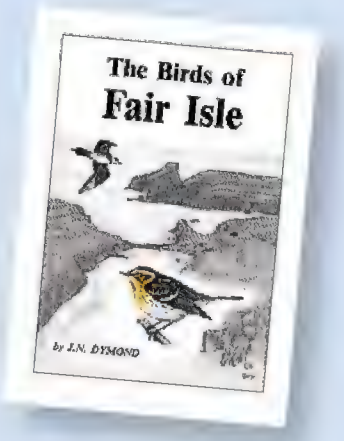


Plate 107. Portuguese control European Storm Petrel, Shiant Isles, 10 July 2021. © *Noelia Dominguez Alvarez*

2023 Research and Survey grants - plan ahead!
This year saw a welcome increase in the number of applications received, following a sharp drop during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Club is to be congratulated for matching this with more funding available annually for disbursement. The closing date for applications for Endowment Fund grants is 31 January each year after which the Research & Surveys Committee considers each application and decides the level of funding, if any, to be awarded. This is usually achieved by mid-February so that applicants can get their funding in place for the fieldwork season (whether breeding or non-breeding). Payments are made on or around 1 April. Given that there is a finite amount of money in the pot each year, and in the interests of fairness to those submitting application forms timeously, please note that we are unable to accept late applications. As such, if you think you might require some funding for a research project, please plan ahead to avoid disappointment. For more information on the scheme and how to apply, visit the Research and Survey Grants page of the SOC website.

Colin Corse, Research & Surveys Committee

SOC support for *The Birds of Fair Isle*



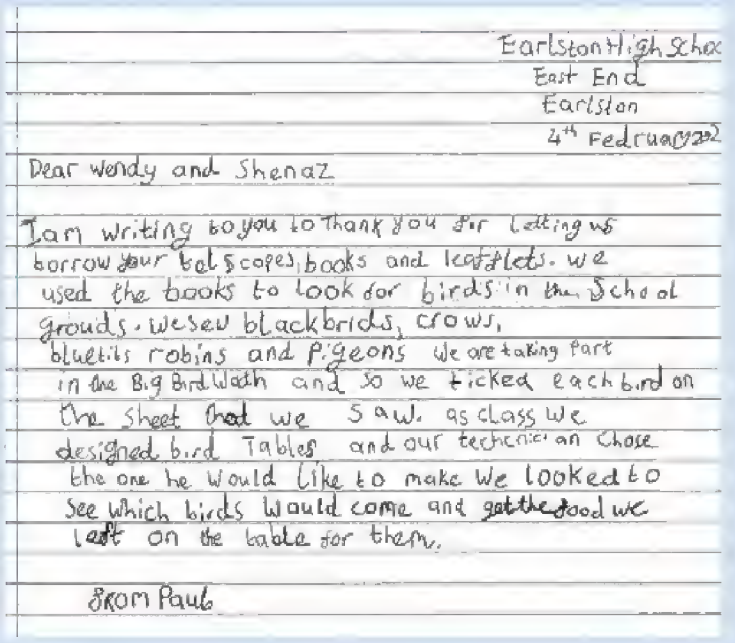
We are pleased to announce the latest publication to be awarded a grant from the SOC's Birds of Scotland Fund. An application by Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust (FIBOT) for £5,000 to produce a comprehensive local avifauna was approved in January. Following its assessment of the application, the Birds of Scotland Fund Committee recommended that a digital version be made available, to be released simultaneously with the print version, regarding this as a way to widen the reach of the publication, particularly among a younger ornithological audience, as well as recognising that digital media is now the default for many people. A further £3,000 was awarded to support the production of the digital version. The book will update and expand on the last publication (1991, pictured) and will be largely based on the migration log database that the BS3 Fund helped

to finance the digitisation of ten years ago. It will be a lavishly illustrated, graphic-rich single volume with *c.* 700 pages, edited by Ian Andrews and written by a highly experienced team consisting of Ian Andrews, Roger Riddington, Deryk Shaw, Will Miles, Rebecca Nason, Paul Harvey and Steve Arlow. Published by FIBOT, the authors, editorial team and photographers are not being paid for their work. Any profit from this project will be reinvested into FIBOT.

For details of how to apply for a Birds of Scotland Fund grant and a list of publications and projects supported to date, visit the SOC website (About Us/Grants).

HQ puts second hand optics to good use

In January, staff at Waterston House were approached by Pupil Support teacher Heather Monks of Earlston High School in the Scottish Borders seeking to borrow telescopes for a bird recording project being undertaken by senior pupils as part of the school's commitment to making its grounds more welcoming for birds. The project included building a feeding station and making bird food, with a view to recording the number of birds and variety of species attracted to the site over the course of a week at the end of January, coinciding with RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch. Waterston House was delighted to be able to assist with the loan of some good quality telescopes and tripods, with Visitor Experience Officer, Shenaz Khimji, providing Heather with a demo on how to set the equipment up. Borders bird recorder, David Parkinson, provided further support by showing how the pupils' sightings can be entered on to BirdTrack via the SOC's mobile app, 'Where to Watch birds in Scotland'.



Earlston High Scho
East End
Earlston
4th Februa 2022

Dear Wendy and Shenaz

I am writing to you to thank you for letting us borrow your telescopes, books and leaflets. we used the books to look for birds in the School grounds. we saw blackbirds, crows, bluetits robins and pigeons We are taking part in the Big Bird Wath and so we ticked each bird on the sheet that we saw. as class we designed bird Tables and our technician chose the one he would like to make We looked to see which birds would come and get the food we left on the table for them.

From Paul

Plate 108. Letter from Earlston High School pupil, February 2022.

Plate 109. Senior pupil, Earlston High School, January 2022. © *Heather Monks*

Plate 110. Ruth Briggs, Shetland, 2001. © *Ruth Briggs*

Council updates

New SOC President - Ruth Briggs

We are delighted to announce that we have a new President! Ruth is based in Drem, East Lothian, and submitted her application for the role back in February. After impressing Council's Appointments Panel at an informal interview over Zoom, her nomination was recommended by the Panel to Council who duly approved Ruth's appointment as Temporary Trustee until the next AGM, when her formal appointment as President can take place. Ruth joined the SOC in 2007 but has been a birdwatcher for as long as she can remember. She took early retirement from a long career in nature conservation, having been Area Manager for NatureScot (SNH at the time) in the Northern Isles, based in Shetland, and in south-east Scotland, with additional strategic experience in organisational review and development.

Ruth is experienced in board work and interested in governance of environment-related organisations and charities. She is currently on the boards of Edinburgh & Lothians Greenspace Trust and The Conservation Volunteers' Chestnut Fund committee (the latter as Chair), and formerly chaired the Forth Estuary Forum and various other committees.

Ruth has already carried out her first official public engagement as SOC President, opening the Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference in Elgin in March and is rapidly getting to know staff, fellow Office Bearers and the key areas of business of Council and the various sub-committees and working groups. It is a steep learning curve but Ruth is keen to get stuck in: *"It's many years since I've felt so delighted about taking on a new role. It is a privilege to contribute to such a highly regarded Club".*

Council is confident that Ruth will make an excellent President, bringing a wealth of relevant skills and board experience to the role as well as bags of enthusiasm and a warm, engaging personality.

To contact Ruth, email president@the-soc.org.uk. Written correspondence can be sent via Waterston House.

Vacancy: Vice-President *Birding and Science*

Prof Jeremy Wilson will be standing down from the role at this year's AGM (26 November), having served as Vice-President (latterly as VP *Birding and Science*) for the Club since 2017. We are therefore seeking an enthusiastic SOC member with a scientific/research background and who is a visible member of the birding or bird research and conservation community to take up the reins and help to steer the SOC's work in this area. For a detailed description of the role and how to submit a note of interest, head over to the vacancies page of the SOC website or get in touch with Wendy at HQ: mail@the-soc.org.uk

Membership subscription rates

Members will be aware that it is a number of years since the Club last increased its subscription rates. In fact, the last uplift was in September 2017. At the time of the 2021 review, Council adopted the Finance Committee's proposal that rates be frozen in recognition of the fact that, during the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated lockdown restrictions, the Club could not offer the full range of benefits to the members.

As the Club's operations have largely returned to pre-pandemic levels, I have now completed a

review of subscription levels in consultation with the Finance Committee and various Club officers. I therefore recommended to SOC Council at its March meeting that the Adult membership rate be increased to £42.00 with effect from 1 September 2022, and that the other membership categories increase in roughly the same proportion. The print subscription fee will continue to include access to *Scottish Birds Online*.

This year, the Club is also introducing a 'digital-only' option to the categories, for those members who are happy to receive the Club's journal, *Scottish Birds,* online only. Many members have expressed support for this initiative, which helps reduce the Club's carbon footprint and enhances our environmental credentials. In recognition of the expected savings for the SOC from reduced printing costs, we decided that the rate for digital only could remain at the current subscription level. So any members opting for digital only will see no change in their membership fee. The exceptions to this are the Junior and Student categories, where we decided to apply a substantial subsidy for the digital version, as part of the Club's ongoing investment in nurturing young ornithologists.

Council approved the new rates, which can be viewed on inside cover of this issue as well as on the SOC website

The main factors considered in setting these new rates were a recognition of the fact that it is five years since the last increase and, in that period, the Club's running costs have substantially increased due to external economic factors as well as investment in key areas of Club development, such as the creation of a new full-time Birding and Science Officer post. It was agreed at Council that we adopt a formal review of membership subscription rates no later than every two years so that future increases can be managed smoothly.

The contribution of our members to the SOC's work is both acknowledged and greatly appreciated and we hope that we can continue to count on your support for the coming years.

Richard Kerr, Honorary Treasurer

Scottish Birds Online

You should have already received an email from us with details of how to access your digital copy of the current issue as well as your accumulated recent back issues. If you haven't received the email or are experiencing any issues with setting up or accessing your *Scottish Birds* Online account, please contact Kathryn Cox (admin@the-soc.org.uk).

Planning to switch to a digital-only SOC membership?
Please let us know as soon as possible, visit:
www.the-soc.org.uk/switch-to-digital

Plate 111. Experiment no. 1 - mud heap, New Galloway, 15 June 2021. © *Joan Howie*

Home help for Swallows

Last summer in June, as has happened in so many other years, two Swallows arrived and sat twittering and chattering on the bar under the shelter at my back door.

On a whim, I put two spades of earth from the flower border into the upturned plastic dustbin lid bird bath on the grass about 5.5 m from the back door. I then put a couple more spadefuls on to the slabs of the nearby path and then soaked them with water. Thus there were two small areas of wet mud. I then collected a handful of tiny, dried up pieces of grass and other vegetation, as well as pulling some feathers out of a cushion, and scattered all of these close to or on to the mud.

Within a day or so, to my surprise and delight, the Swallows started to collect the mud, and by 16 June they had built the foundations of a nest on the ledge above the kitchen window. This is sheltered by the roof overhang, and was a little more than 5 m from their supply of mud and material.

Plate 112. Experiment no. 2 - dustbin lid, New Galloway, 16 June 2021. © *Joan Howie*

Throughout the incubation period, the male sat on the bar diagonally opposite the nest when not out searching for food. I thought three young hatched, but certainly only two fledged. The whole family roosted together for a few nights on that bar, and after the adults departed the young roosted there for a few more nights.

Obviously, if Swallows turn up again this summer I will repeat the operation. Maybe after this unexpectedly successful experiment a few more people might like to try the same and give some help to a rapidly declining species. Or have others already tried this?

Joan Howie, The Wilderness, High Street, New Galloway, Castle Douglas DG7 3RL.

Plate 113. Remains of kitchen window, Roslin Glen, 21 January 2022. © *Philippa Peat*

Hitchcock comes to Roslin Glen

Mornings are fairly quiet in our household, and one bright morning in late January seemed to be no exception until a heart stopping moment caused my husband to drop the dog bowl he was bending to pick up in the kitchen. Out of the corner of his eye, he glimpsed a moving black shape coming towards him. A drone attack flashed into his mind. A split second later, there was an explosion followed by the sound of shattering glass, a whirl of wings, and then nothing. He looked up, and could scarcely comprehend the large hole in the kitchen window. We are used to greasy outlines of misguided birds flying accidently into the picture windows, followed sometimes by the discovery of a sad body on the ground underneath, but this was something extraordinary. Our bird feeders are placed some ten feet from the window, and also attract watchful corvids and the odd Sparrowhawk. Our guess is that a Carrion Crow had struck the window head on, pierced the outer glass and bounced off the secondary glazing. The force must have given it some headache.

Philippa Peat, Roslin Glen, Midlothian.

Lothian branch targets Spotted Flycatcher

SOC members in the Lothians are being asked to look out for Spotted Flycatchers this summer. Fieldwork for the *South-east Scotland Atlas* (Murray *et al.* 2019) in 2008–13 across both Lothian and Borders found that the number of tetrads occupied by this species had declined by 24% since the previous atlas in 1988–94, with the bulk of the loss in areas below 250 m asl. Higher areas generally showed no change. We have no comparable data on the status of Spotted Flycatcher locally in the last ten years, but the number of records submitted to recent Lothian Bird Reports suggests this is no longer an easy species to find in Lothian.

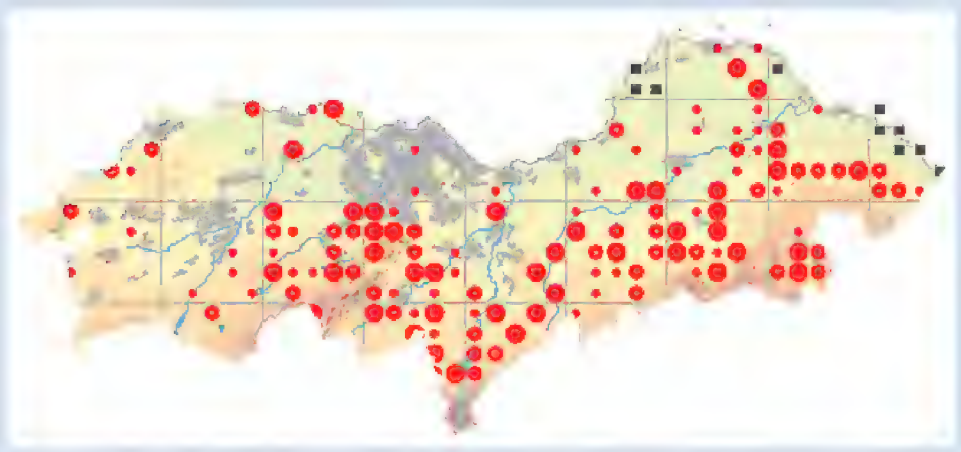


Figure 1. Distribution of Spotted Flycatcher in Lothian, 2008–2013, by tetrad. Red circles indicate level of breeding evidence: confirmed breeding (large), probable breeding (medium) and possible breeding (small). The dark squares show presence of passage birds (not in breeding habitat). Grey shows built-up areas. The main breeding areas lie between 100 and 300m asl along the north flanks of the hill ranges. © *Ian Andrews*

The Lothian Discussion Group, part of the Lothian branch, organises and participates in local bird surveys (among other things). In order to provide fieldwork opportunities for the 2022 breeding season for members of the group, but also the wider SOC membership, we decided to pick one species to focus on this year. We wanted to select one where we were concerned about its status (so wished to find out more) but also one not so scarce that few people would have a chance of finding it. In 2008–13, Spotted Flycatchers were found in 27% of Lothian tetrads, but this was down from 49% in 1988–94.

We therefore ask everyone birding in the Lothians this summer to look out for Spotted Flycatchers in breeding habitat, and ensure that their records are reported to the Lothian Bird Recorder - the best way to do that is to put the records on BirdTrack. This means the recorder will have instant access to the records, and can monitor progress. The *Atlas* suggested that Spotted Flycatchers no longer occur in suburban gardens, but might occur in some larger rural gardens. Often they are to be found in stands of deciduous trees near farm steadings on the fringe of the uplands (especially near fly-attracting byres), in wooded hill valleys, or in open areas of plantation forestry, particularly where there is a mix of coniferous and deciduous trees, and often near water. These habitat preferences presumably relate to the availability of their aerial insect prey.

Those not birdwatching in Lothian need not feel left out - we would encourage you to record Spotted Flycatchers too. This is a declining species across all of Scotland, apart from areas to the north and west of the Great Glen (Balmer *et al*. 2013), so local recorders across the country would probably welcome more data.

This is not a structured survey - we hope volunteers will visit suitable habitat and make a special effort to look for Spotted Flycatchers, and perhaps use the *Atlas* maps to check areas where they occurred ten years ago. When submitting records, it would be especially helpful if you could include breeding evidence, such as singing males, pairs, adults collecting food for young, and fledged juveniles. At the end of this breeding season, we will review how successful this targeting has been, and what the records received tell us about the distribution and numbers of Spotted Flycatchers in our area. Thank you in advance of your cooperation.

Mark Holling for the SOC Lothian Discussion Group

Tawny Owl thawing a dead House Mouse

I regularly operate trail-cameras in a mixed woodland near Forfar. In the past, I have placed dead day-old chicks (available from pet stores) on stumps and branches in front of my camera to capture photographs and video of Buzzards. While downloading images, I saw that a Tawny Owl had come in one night and taken one of the chicks.

One day, I found a dead House Mouse in one of the mouse-traps in my home, and I took this to place in front of the camera in the wood. It subsequently rained and then turned cold with an overnight frost. When I retrieved the camera and looked at the video footage for 3 January 2022, it showed a Tawny Owl swooping onto the mouse. It tried to peck the mouse loose from the branch but it was frozen on. After a few unsuccessful attempts, the owl fluffed up, settled over the mouse, and appeared to brood it from 19:51–20:17 hrs. The bird stayed relatively still, only occasionally looking round. It then stood up, picked up the (now thawed) mouse in its bill, and immediately swallowed it.

I am not aware of this unusual behaviour being recorded before. The Tawny Owl now regularly comes into bait set in front of the camera at night.

Mike Fenton, East Den Brae,
Near Letham, Angus DD8 2PJ.

Plate 114. Sequence of trail-camera still frames illustrating the 27 minute period the Tawny Owl took to thaw and eat the frozen House Mouse, Forfar, Angus & Dundee, 3 January 2022. © *Mike Fenton*

OBITUARIES

Andrew Thomas Macmillan (1933–2021)

Andrew will be remembered for his outstanding contribution to the SOC and Scottish Ornithology over many years from the late 1950s onwards. He was President of SOC from 1975–78, Editor of *Scottish* Birds, and served on several Committees, being awarded Honorary Membership from 1986.

Born in Edinburgh on 21 January 1933, the eldest of three brothers, Andrew's first school was Melville College in Edinburgh, followed by Ardvrech Preparatory School in Crieff. His secondary education was at Sedbergh School in Cumbria, where he boarded from 1946–1950. Here he joined the School's Ornithological Society, where his interest in birds blossomed. His attention to detail manifested itself in the first counts of wildfowl on local waters, counts of local Rookeries, and the location of breeding Oystercatchers. Andrew and friends also made a detailed survey of breeding Meadow Pipits on the local fells. In all, they located 50–60 nests and monitored their success daily, somehow fitting this in with their schoolwork!

After leaving Sedbergh, Andrew began a Chartered Accountancy apprenticeship with an Edinburgh firm, passing all his examinations. He subsequently joined the family firm of Andrew Melrose Ltd, an independent tea and coffee merchant based in Leith. Eventually, he became the Financial Director before taking early retirement in 1987 after the company was sold. He was an active member of the Leith High Constables, and was Moderator in 1982.

Plate 115. Andrew Macmillan, Edinburgh. © *Joanna Macmillan*

Andrew lived the rest of his life in the Edinburgh area, becoming actively involved with the SOC. Dougal Andrew had launched the *Edinburgh Bird Bulletin* in 1950, but stood down as Editor in 1957 when Andrew took over. The following year saw the launch of *Scottish Birds* under the editorship of Maury Meiklejohn, with both Andrew and Dougal as Assistant Editors. Andrew became Editor in 1962–70 setting up the organisation for a modern series of *Scottish Bird Reports* and compiling those for 1968 and 1969 himself.

Andrew did not confine his support to the SOC. He was Chairman of RSPB Scottish Committee from 1973–75, Member of the Secretary of State's Advisory Committee on the Protection of Birds for Scotland between 1970–81 as well as the NCC Advisory Committee on Birds from 1981–84. He was a former Trustee of the George Lodge Trust, and Trustee of the Fair Isle Bird Observatory and Management Committee member from 1970–86. In his retirement Andrew played an active role in the Lothian Mute Swan Census. He walked the canals and water bodies throughout Edinburgh to record the location of ringed and un-ringed swans and new cygnets, returning the detailed results to the Scottish organiser.

Andrew had many other hobbies. He built up very comprehensive and well-respected collections of Scottish Trade Tokens, Scottish Communion Tokens, and Scottish bank notes and cheques, most of which he later sold. He also assembled an exceptionally fine and comprehensive ornithological library which followed the bibliography in Baxter & Rintoul's *Birds of Scotland* (1953) and was very nearly complete. I was able to sell it on his behalf before he moved house in 2007.

He regularly attended opera performances in Edinburgh, and enjoyed listening to classical and opera music at home. He was a life-long hill walker, and in his retirement organised walks around Edinburgh, taking meticulous details of distances, timings and possible hazards in a recce prior to the meeting. One amusing group to which he belonged was called the ROMEOS (Retired old Men Eating Out), formed initially as a cooking club by a member of Murrayfield Parish Church for recently bereaved widowers. This turned into a fine dining lunch club combining a walk to the chosen restaurant, enjoying the best of food and good company. By complete contrast, an introduction during a ROMEO outing led to him joining the Edinburgh Croquet Club where he played regularly eventually winning his first ever sporting trophy aged 75 years, the first of many.

By nature, Andrew was somewhat serious, but he was fine company, good humoured, and gave sound advice to the many committees to which he belonged. He died in hospital aged 88 years on 7 December 2021 after a short illness. His wife Helen had predeceased him in 2005, and they leave two daughters, Caroline and Joanna and three grandchildren.

David Clugston

Gillian Herbert (1953–2022)

Gillian's sudden and untimely death came as a great shock to her many friends in the Lothian branch of the SOC, where she made an outstanding contribution over many years. In 2006, she became a committee member of the branch, and in 2008 became the Outdoor Meetings Co-ordinator, which she did for 13 years. She co-ordinated the monthly outdoor outings, arranged car sharing, no easy task when dealing with late requests, people who cancelled at the last minute, and no shows: all done with her pleasant, friendly manner and patience, which was a big help to the people leading the outings. She was especially helpful and encouraging to new members. With her quiet efficiency, humour, and a smile, she also organised the Lothian Branch Christmas outings. This entailed a morning's bird watching from Waterston House, followed by a popular lunch at a local restaurant for up to 40 members,

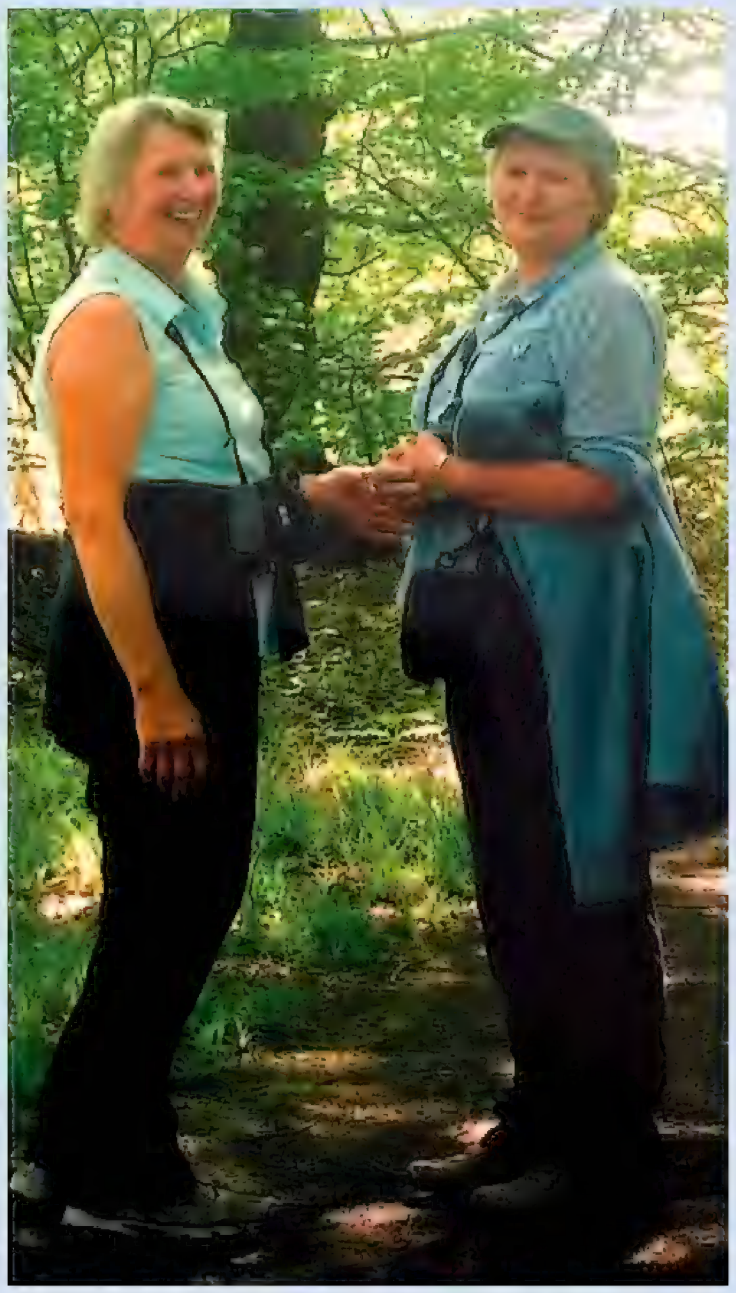


Plate 116. Gillian Herbert (right) with Marjorie Adams, Blean Wood, Kent, June 2013. © *Doreen Main*

fondly remembered by us all. She loyally attended indoor meetings too and conferences, considerately offering lifts. After several conferences, she would report on the lectures for *Scottish Birds*.

Gillian was also an enthusiastic participant in several trips - to Castle Douglas, Fair Isle, Kent, and Gallocanta (Spain). She relished the challenges some of the trips entailed. Coming back from Fair Isle, there was bad weather, and the plane could not return for her group. Gillian had a commitment at home, so she came back on the *Good Shepherd* and had a dreadful journey, very seasick, and belted in below deck. At Sumburgh Airport, she looked very shaky - but put a brave face on it, of course.

At what was to be our last meeting with her, just before Christmas, when the pandemic restrictions had been lifted a bit, five of us met up with our coats on in the garden, drinking soup and eating mince pies, with plenty of chat, catching up about birds as well as everything else.

She was a delightful person who epitomised the friendship side of our Club, and is greatly missed by all her friends in the SOC.

Compiled by Sue Goode, Hillary Maxfield, Doreen & James Main

LETTER

Eddie Maguire

To be touched by the obituary of a man whom we met only once for an hour or so some 4½ years ago is surely a measure of the man. My wife Gill and I moved to Edinburgh in 2017. On 12 September of that year, we attended our first SOC Lothian Branch meeting as enthusiastic novice birders. One week later, while we were holidaying in Argyll, we stumbled across the Machrihanish Seabird Observatory and met Eddie Maguire. The warm welcome and time he afforded to two novices and the knowledge he shared with us in our short visit, even the not-to-be-refused way he persuaded us to donate to the observatory, left a lasting impression on both of us. From time to time, we still have occasion to mention him. We were both saddened to read of his death, but it was more than a little inspiring to learn more about him.

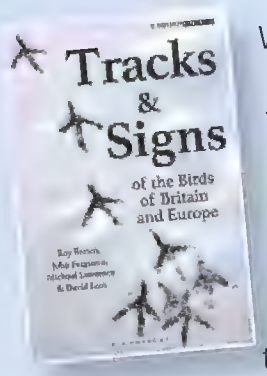
David Parmee, SOC Lothian Branch Secretary

BOOK REVIEWS

The book reviews published in *Scottish Birds* reflect the views of the named reviewers and not those of the SOC.

Tracks and Signs of the Birds of Britain and Europe

Roy Brown, John Ferguson, Michael Lawrence & David Lees, 2021. Bloomsbury, London. ISBN: 978-1-4729-7318-4, edition 3, 416 pages, paperback, colour photos, colour & b/w illustrations, £29.99.



When *Tracks and Signs* appeared in 1987, it broke new ground as the first book to provide a wide range of illustrations of individual feathers, together with relevant information on tracks and skulls. Its success led to a second edition in 2002; the latest, fully revised third edition is 25% longer and includes some re-organisation, with increased attention to habitat (usually a helpful starting point when considering an unidentified feather, skull etc.). The next section (perhaps the book's USP) is on Tracks and Trails, providing detailed descriptions and measurements of the 'footprints' of birds. This is followed by a relatively short chapter on nests and roosts. The latter is covered in only one page, and the keen nest-finder would probably want to use *Tracks and Signs* alongside other guides (such as the *BTO Field Guide to Monitoring Nests*) which also provide information on eggs and nestlings. Feeding signs, pellets, and droppings are covered next, before a long chapter on skulls which, following an introductory classification, provides line drawings and measurements of a wide range of species. I was surprised to find a sample size of one for some waders on which a lot of biometric research has been published (e.g. Purple Sandpiper). The final and longest chapter provides 71 plates of feathers. While some of these are new, e.g. Great Skua, the majority are those used previously with the, at times, eclectic grouping of species on the same plate, e.g. feathers of Little Stint alongside Zitting Cisticola. A key element, often overlooked, is the inclusion of feather lengths which helps compensate for the limited number of feathers illustrated from each species. The book has an excellent index, and there has also been some updating of the texts and bibliography. This perhaps give an insight into the on-line future of this field through the use of sites such as www.featherbase.info and www.skullsite.com.

Tracks and Signs when it first appeared threw down a gauntlet which later authors have successfully picked up and enlarged upon, but this new edition still provides a very useful introductory guide.

David C. Jardine

Vagrancy in Birds

Alexander Lees & James Gilroy, 2021. Helm, London. ISBN: 978-1-4729-6478-6, hardback, 400 pages, 475 colour photos and colour illustrations, £29.99.

I was very much looking forward to this publication, and it certainly doesn't disappoint. The authors have produced the first book dedicated to this difficult and complicated topic and at such a level that it should become the standard reference on the subject.

Nine chapters follow the Introduction, each covering a specific aspect of vagrancy such as Wind Drift and Vagrancy, Extreme Weather, and Irruptions and Human-Driven Vagrancy. I found each so valuable in helping me understand current concepts associated with (and the cause of) vagrancy in birds that it was difficult to put the book down. I craved for more and more ideas, examples, theories and hypotheses on the subject. Of course, to understand vagrancy one must understand migration and how birds navigate. This is superbly dealt with in the first chapter, which describes the four avian compasses and the avian clock. The authors have performed a sterling piece of work on each subject. It is difficult to include favourite examples in a short review since there are so many, but chapters which discuss Avian Vagrancy in an Era of Global Change are especially thought-provoking and timely.

Much of the book is given to species accounts which are helpfully arranged by family. The length of each section varies depending on the family involved. For example, Laridae (gulls, terns and skimmers) are given 11 pages, Scolopacidae (sandpipers and allies) seven pages. For me, the great strength of this book is the level and depth of detail within the family accounts which have clearly been well researched (39 pages of references testify to that). These accounts give facts and information on world-wide vagrancy, so not only detail vagrants in a British context (many of which have been well covered elsewhere previously), but others from around the world. Of course, for British birders it is easier to relate to species that are most familiar to us, and this book has countless

examples. Take, for example, Willow Warbler reaching Ashmore Reef, Australia and European Robin records from Japan and eastern North America. There are many examples given within the family accounts of extreme vagrancy which highlight the astonishing journeys that some individuals undertake. The Bermudan record of Dark-sided Flycatcher, an Eastern Palearctic species that was at least 9,000 km out of range, is one such example. Special mention must be made of Eye-browed Thrush. The account states 'the global spread of vagrant records of this species rivals that of any other land bird'. It is hard to disagree, with two records from Africa - Morocco, and north-west Senegal, the latter representing a minimum movement of 10,000 km. The account of New World Warblers will have UK birders musing over future possibilities to our isles. I noticed repeated mention of many locations in the family accounts, clearly vagrant 'traps', and this had me searching Google maps to locate them. Check out, for example, Ashmore Reef (Australia), the Farallon Islands (California) and Attu Island (Alaska), and it is easy to see why they have such an impressive track record for hosting rare birds.

The book is brimming with colour photographs, stunning images adorn every page. Personal favourites are the striking Williamson's Sapsucker clinging to rocks on an offshore Californian island, a migrant Red-breasted Nuthatch hitching a lift on a birder's shoulder on a boat trip off Attu, and the Old World pairing of Brambling and Hawfinch sharing the same rooftop on St Paul Island, Alaska, but there are countless others to drool over!

In summary, this is a superb book which sets a new standard in our knowledge and understanding of avian vagrancy. It comes thoroughly recommended to amateur and experienced observers alike who have an interest both in deeply considered ideas concerning this fascinating topic, and the incredible journeys that birds undertake around the globe. If ever there was a book that abundantly demonstrates that 'birds know no boundaries', this is it. I cannot recommend it highly enough.

Paul Baxter

Seabirds: The New Identification Guide

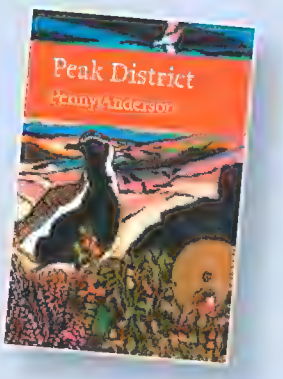
Peter Harrison, Martin Perrow & Hans Larsson, 2021. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona. ISBN 978-84-16728-41-1, 600 pages, over 3,800 colour illustrations, many coloured distribution maps, hardback, £75.00.

This comprehensive text demystifies the art of identifying seabirds and covers the world's 434 species in detail, including the latest revisions in taxonomy. Whether you are a 'seabirder' or enjoy birdwatching more generally, this book will earn its keep in your collection. Each species is accompanied with concise yet detailed descriptions and range distribution maps. The all-important written comparison with confusion species is particularly thorough, especially when compared with more general field guides. What really elevates this book to classic field guide status for me though, is that the eloquent descriptions are combined with brilliantly annotated illustrations by the masterful Hans Larsson. The amalgamation of text and distribution maps alongside relevant plates makes identification simple and is a welcome improvement to the layout used in the 1983 version of *Seabirds*, Harrison's indispensable 'original' that this book ultimately supersedes. What I especially like about this book is the imaginative use of illustration as an aid to identification. As well as conventional drawn plates, there are several others that allow cross reference of different species with ease. One of my favourites is a plate showing Sulidae (gannets and boobies) in different moult stages on one page for easy comparison. Details such as this make for a guide that's enjoyable to dip into from the comfort of your armchair as well as an invaluable reference in the field.

Shenaz N. Khimji

Peak District

Penny Anderson, 2021. New Naturalist series 144, Harper Collins, London. ISBN 9780008257378, 511 pages, hardback, colour photos, colour illustrations, £64.99.



This is an excellent book, not to be confused with NN 44 *The Peak District*, published 60 years ago in 1962. In that book, almost all the photographs were in black and white; here all are in colour. The author is an ecologist who has lived in or near the Peak District National Park for over 50 years. She gained considerable experience serving on numerous bodies in and around the Park. Her writing style is a pleasure to read, with frequent mention of human activity and its effects on the natural world from prehistoric times to the present day. The chapter sequence is similar to that in NN 44 - geology, landscapes, habitats, etc. Birds do not get a specific chapter, but are well covered under each habitat. The Species Index includes almost 100 birds (there is also

a General Index). The main text runs to 459 pages (220 in NN 44), plus 51 pages of appendices, references, two indexes, a glossary and a gazetteer of sites, all well worth having.

Many writers on the Peak District describe two main sections mainly located in Derbyshire - the Dark Peak (blackish rocks, acid soils) and the White Peak (carboniferous limestone, alkali soils). Penny Anderson also identifies a third distinct section, the South West Moors, mostly the extensive parts in north Staffordshire plus smaller parts in Cheshire. This is refreshing for me who, as a teenager 70 years ago, learned basic hillwalking skills in those parts.

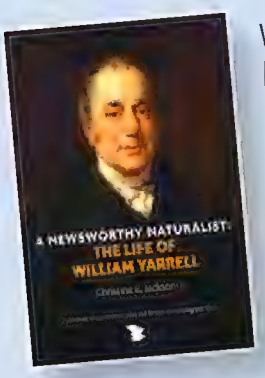
The population living within a day-trip of the Park, whether by car, cycle or public transport, probably numbers about five million in the surrounding English conurbation. Its popularity is therefore not surprising. Many will make their first visit when quite young, which may account for the strong affections it inspires.

Those who already know the Peak District will find much in this up-to-date book to delight them, as will those less familiar with this wonderful National Park. I strongly recommend it.

John Law

A Newsworthy Naturalist: The Life of William Yarrell

Christine E. Jackson, 2021. John Beaufoy Publishing, Oxford in association with British Ornithologists' Club. ISBN 978-1-913679-04-0, hardback, 248 pages, four portraits, numerous wood engravings, £25.



William Yarrell (1784–1856) is best known for his *British Fishes* and *British Birds*, illustrated by wood engravings. Those books remained updated standard works for 60 years to the end of the 19th century, carrying on the tradition and style of Thomas Bewick (1753–1828). It was Yarrell who identified and named the Bewick's Swan in memory of his old friend, who was the first to recognise it as differing from the Whooper Swan.

Yarrell and his books are important because they were accessible and affordable to a wide public - and *British Birds* laid a groundwork for ornithologists to develop into the 20th century (e.g. Alfred Newton, Howard Saunders and Eagle Clarke).

Self-educated in zoology (including dissecting and physiology), Yarrell was active on many natural history societies' committees in London, while managing his leading newspapers and bookseller's business.

His many friendships among prominent naturalists included Darwin, Jenyns, Henslow, Selby, Gould and Jardine. They exchanged specimens, ideas, advice and socialised. Jardine provided Yarrell with records of birds in Scotland. John Gould and Yarrell in London even hosted homely parties of naturalists to toast Sir William Jardine's daughters' marriages in faraway Dumfriesshire.

Yarrell's biographer, Christine Jackson, has also written books about Jardine, Selby, Audubon and bird and fish artists. Hence her comprehensive command of diverse sources brings Yarrell and his world truly alive.

Peter Holt

New Books also received in the George Waterston Library

Birds of Ghana (Second Edition). Nik Borrow & Ron Demey, 2022. HELM/Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. ISBN 978-1-4729-8772-3, paperback, 368 pages, £30.00.

Birds of the Middle East: A Photographic Guide. Abdul Rahman Al-Sirhan, Jens Eriksen & Richard Porter, 2022. HELM/Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. ISBN 978-1-4729-8675-7, paperback, 224 pages, £16.99.

Female Heroes of Bird Conservation. Rosemary Low, 2021. Insignis Publications, Mansfield. ISBN 978-1-7399130-0-7, paperback, 254 pages, £21.95.

How Birds Evolve: What Science Reveals about Their Origin, Lives, and Diversity. Douglas J. Futuyma, 2022. Princeton University Press. ISBN 978-0691182629, hardback, 320 pages, £25.00.

The Wryneck. Gerard Gorman, 2022. Pelagic Publishing, Exeter. ISBN 978-1-78427-288-3, paperback, 216 pages, £25.00.

The George Waterston Library is open for browsing and borrowing during Waterston House opening hours (check SOC website). Books can either be borrowed directly or can be posted out (UK only, conditions and p&p charges apply) by emailing the Librarian (Library@the-soc.org.uk).

OBSERVATORIES' ROUNDUP

Observatories' Roundup is a regular bi-annual feature about our bird observatories in Scotland. The intention is to publicise the work of the observatories, visiting opportunities, as well as incidental snippets of news from the islands.

Fair Isle Bird Observatory

Late autumn turned up, as ever, some excellent days of birding for the few hardy souls who managed to visit Fair Isle. Highlights were undoubtedly in the shape of two firsts for the Isle being Baikal Teal and Daurian Shrike. Both birds were popular for those on the Isle and a number of birders who were on Shetland mainland and managed to get across to see them.

Amongst the other rarities found were White's Thrush, Buff-bellied Pipit, Red-flanked Bluetail, Olive-backed Pipit and perhaps with the best views ever available in Scotland - Surf Scoter. There was a good passage of common migrants which was laced with the usual scarcities such as Short-toed Lark, Little Bunting and Woodchat Shrike.

Work continues apace with the rebuild of the Observatory, though most of this is currently taking place behind the scenes. However, an inordinate amount of work is being undertaken to ensure that once completed it will be one of the best bird observatories of the world and cement its integral role within the Fair Isle community and economy.

The completion date is still on timetable to allow us to fully reopen in the spring of 2023, when we will be looking forward to welcoming birders both new and old to the Obs. The completion of the building will also allow us to develop a number of new and exciting projects, so watch this space!

At present, we have our full complement of ornithological seasonal staff, allowing us to continue and maintain our long-standing ornithological studies. Going forward, we also anticipate being able to recruit new permanent staff to run the Observatory from late autumn, so everything is pointing positively forward.

Douglas Barr, Chairman
of the Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust

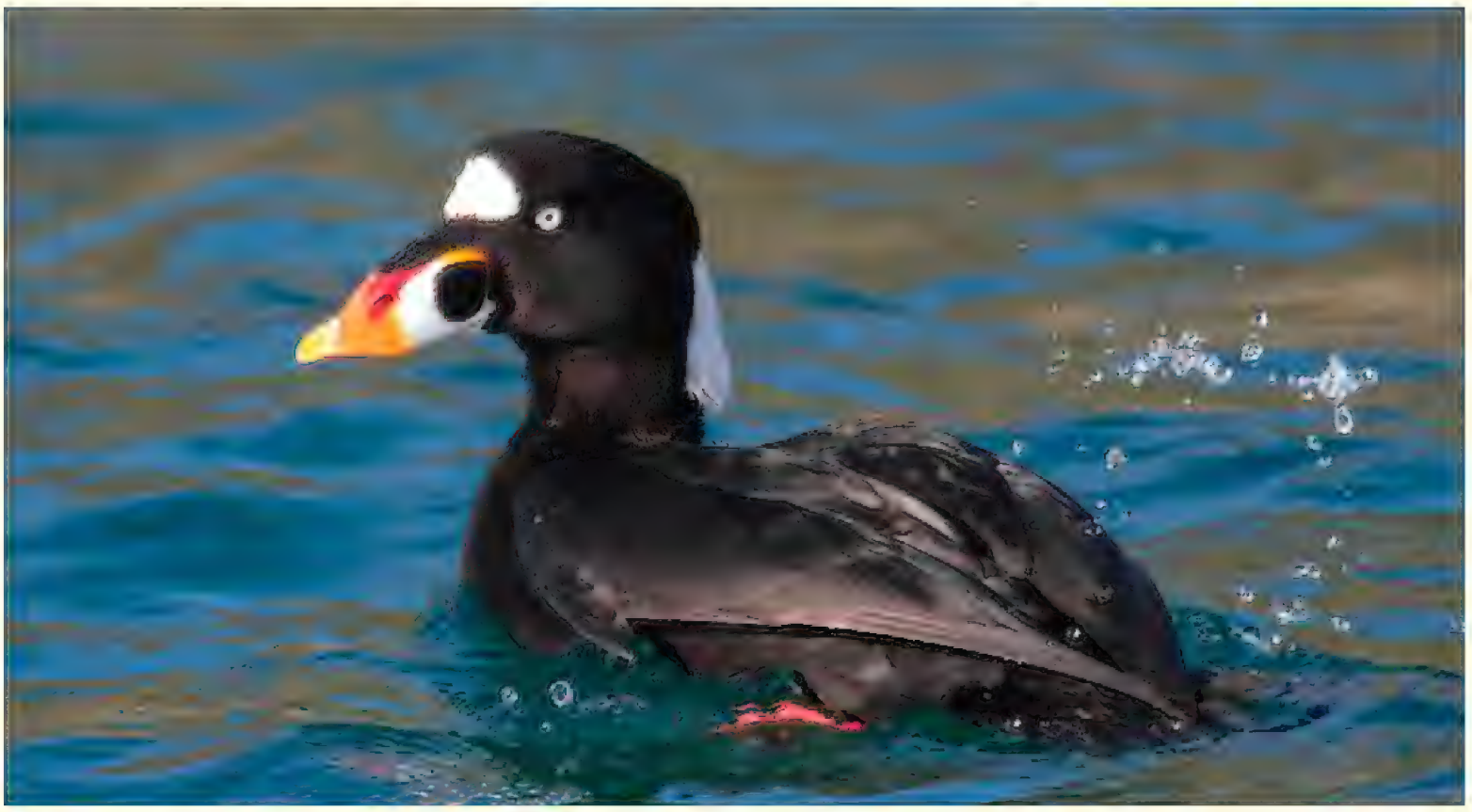


Plate 117. Surf Scoter, North Haven, Fair Isle, 11 October 2021. © *Alex Penn*

Isle of May Bird Observatory

The final few months of the 2021 season saw a flurry of activity, although overall the lack of easterly winds failed to produce the hoped for avalanche of birds. The month of October began where September had left off, with good passage of Pink-footed Geese throughout the month with a peak of 1,500 on 6th whilst 2,133 Barnacle Geese were logged heading west on 12 October, a new record for the island. Other wildfowl movements of note included Whooper Swan passage on eight dates peaking at 17 on 6 October, Velvet Scoter on five dates, Common Scoter on thirteen dates, Red-breasted Merganser on ten dates (a good showing) and Goosander on three dates including eight on 15 October.

However, the most noticeable seawatching highlight of the year was the major influx of Grey Phalaropes and Little Auks, particularly in early November. The discovery of a single Grey Phalarope found spinning on the sea off the Low Light on 15–16 October represented only the third ever record for the island. However, this was surpassed by an east coast invasion which brought four together on the sea on 3 November, followed by seven the next day and one on 5 November, a very impressive showing (although nearby Fife Ness recorded 28 on 4 November). This shows that recording in early November can still be very productive. The same spell of weather which brought the phalaropes also brought good numbers of Little Auks, with daily counts for the week including peaks of 1,182 on 5th, 1,021 on 6th and 1,371 on 8 November. Elsewhere at sea, Divers were evident throughout October with Great Northern Divers logged on a further six dates, whilst Little Gull numbers peaked at an impressive 238 on 4 October with 178 on 29 September. As well as the sea, it was worth watching the island roost areas as 217 Cormorant were counted on 11 October, a new record high for the May.

As far as migration was concerned on the island, the expected easterlies struggled to materialise and as a result the first (and only) Yellow-browed Warbler was seen between 29 October and 1 November. Despite this, there were still some noteworthy birds. Radde's Warbler appeared twice on 7–8 October and again on 31 October–1 November, representing the tenth and eleventh island records. A stunning Pallas's Warbler was discovered along Holymans Road on 1 November (the ninth island record) whilst two Ravens on the west cliffs on 9–10 October were island rarities. These large corvids returned to the island from 16–19 October raising questions about whether the species could become a future breeding species considering how numbers along coastal Scotland continue to increase. Other autumn passage movements of note included an impressive 35 Jack Snipe on 12 October (a record high), an impressive 13,165 Redwing west on 17 October, another Barn Owl returned to winter on the island (or was it the same as the spring bird?) and up to six Short-eared Owl were resident during the late autumn.

Plate 118. Jack Snipe, Isle of May, 12 October 2021. *© David Steel*

Overall it was far from a classic year as both the spring and autumn struggled for long periods with no major falls occurring. A total of 163 species was recorded, representing the eighth ever highest annual total, with noticeable highlights of the year including:

3rd–6th	Grey Phalarope (previous in 1983 and 1996)
6th	Woodchat Shrike
9th	Pallas's Warbler
10th–11th	Radde's Warbler
10th	Honey Buzzard
11th–12th	Raven
16th	Sabine's Gull
17th	Rustic Bunting
20th	Greenish Warbler

Plate 119. Radde's Warbler, Isle of May, 7 October 2021. © *David Steel*

Scarce and island oddities

Little Grebe: recorded for third consecutive year. **Red-necked Grebe:** recorded in four of the last five years. **Whimbrel:** overwintering for third winter 2019–20, 2020–21 and now 2021–22. **Wood Sandpiper:** recorded for second consecutive year. **Iceland Gull:** for the fifth consecutive year. **Barn Owl:** only recorded in 13 previous years. **Common Rosefinch:** only one blank year in past 30 years. **Red-backed Shrike:** only three blank years in past 30 years.

Birds not recorded this season

Water Rail: first time since 2014. **Ruff:** first time since 2016. **Red-breasted Flycatcher:** first time since 2011. **Bluethroat:** only recorded in two of the previous seven years. **Icterine Warbler:** first time since 2017. **Wryneck:** our last one was on 9 May 2016.

Interesting reports

Summering **Redwing** and **Chaffinch. Common Scoter** 126 north on 19 May. **Swallow** 669 on 25 September, 235 south on 4 October. **House Martin** 61 on 25 September. Over-wintering **Whimbrel** for second and third winter. 60 **Woodcock** in heavy snow fall on 11 February. 1,182 **Little Auks** on 5 November. Latest ever **Osprey** south on 15 October.

David Steel, NatureScot Reserve Manager
Email: David.Steel@nature.scot

North Ronaldsay Bird Observatory

October started in good fashion and early dates boasted some good birds. The Arctic Warbler hung on to the start of the month and still gave good views in and around North Gravity, while a Little Stint, three Yellow-browed Warblers and a large count of 255 Chaffinch gave the opening days of the month a busy look. The 3rd saw perhaps the bird of the month in the shape of the island's eighth Lanceolated Warbler at Senness, a migrant that's gone from near mythical to almost expected in the last three or four years. A strange Common Sandpiper-type wader managed to give staff the slip on the 3rd as it was flushed from irises around Westness, much to the mounting frustration of the staff! A good movement of geese between 6th and 8th saw 71 Pink-footed Geese move through while a Richard's Pipit was in Loch Park. Two Yellow-browed Warblers remained in the poorest season to my memory in a long time! The Richard's Pipit would re-appear briefly on 9th but the day's highlight bird was a Red-breasted Flycatcher at Senness. The 11th saw a Pectoral Sandpiper settle briefly on the Links, somewhat predictable given the near constant westerlies. A bumper period in the run up to the halfway mark in October saw the discovery of the island's fourth Little Egret in the bay at Nouster and the autumn's second and our third ever Lesser Yellowlegs. Initially on the Links, it was rediscovered about half a mile away on the brae near the school! The other highlight from this period was a Velvet Scoter that passed the sea-watch hide and made it onto the year list. The 16th would see a Grey Phalarope pass the sea-watch hide but the following day was a better sea-watch with a juvenile Long-tailed Skua, 18 Pomarine Skua, 4 Arctic Skua, 11 Little Auk and 2,173 Kittiwake, not to mention yet another Fea's-type Petrel taking the total sightings to seven for the year! The 18th was, in simple terms, busy. A large overnight arrival of autumnal migrants included 3,000+ Redwing, 700+ Blackbird, 40+ Song Thrush, 10+ Ring Ouzel, 30+ Goldcrest, 58 Robin, 6 Woodcock, 2 Long-eared Owls 200+ Brambling, 3 Chaffinch, a Lesser Whitethroat, a Willow Warbler and a Chiffchaff. Perhaps the biggest surprise of the day was the discovery of a perished Cory's Shearwater under the lighthouse!

The Green-winged Teal was seen again on Gretchen Loch on the 22nd, although it wasn't until the evening that the standout highlight of the day was found, with a smart Hornemann's Arctic Redpoll trapped at Holland. This would be followed on the 24th by perhaps the most overdue bird of the year in the shape of a Little Bunting. It sounds blasé, but we really thought it wasn't to happen! Another year list addition on the 24th was a Yellowhammer just feet away from the Little Bunting around Trap 4. Another Red-breasted Flycatcher was present on 25th. However, news from a neighbouring island pulled staff away for a few days as David Roche struck ornithological gold, much to our envy, as he pulled undoubtably the bird of the year out the hat with a stunning Varied Thrush. Going into November this was perhaps what we needed, as Tom went into overdrive and aimed to pull his own rabbit out the hat and he did so on 1 November. After finding another Richard's Pipit in the late stages of October he managed to pull Orkney's first Blyth's Pipit from pretty much nowhere. The bird was highly mobile and led us on a bit of a chase around the island but eventually we pinned the bird down, obtained a viable sound recording and some poor pictures only for the bird to totally vanish! This pretty much ended the year's birding despite the few odds and ends like the Green-winged Teal that hung on until just before Christmas before vanishing and a Glossy Ibis that appeared on the School Brae.

With staff away in various sunnier locations before and after Christmas, there were no consistent observers until the first week of February. However, a first-winter Glaucous Gull was on Gretchen on 7 January and a group of highly unseasonal Black-tailed Godwits decided to spend the winter on the island. Two Glaucous Gulls spent the early parts of February bumbling around in the northern half of the island. A relentless onslaught of high winds meant early year birding wasn't what anyone could call enjoyable but a lone Glaucous Gull around Bewan on 10th brightened things up a little while Linnets returned to the island in the middle of the month. The first Woodpigeon arrived on 16th and up to five Robins were around on 18th. The first Iceland Gull finally appeared on 23rd, while early an Lesser Black-backed Gull and Rook made up the best of the rest. A Stonechat at North Gravity on 28th saw the month out with a glimmer of spring on the horizon.

March started with a Woodcock in Holland and three Short-eared Owls at Peckhole, while extra Iceland and Glaucous Gulls kept interest in the large Gulls high. The first Black Redstart of the year was at Vincoin on 14th and was followed by a second bird two days later. The 16th was a good birdy day aside from the Black Redstart, the first Chiffchaff of the year was at Westness along with the first Goldcrest of the year.

The 18th would see the appearance of two Otters, an adult female accompanied by a kit, at Brides and the first Song Thrushes of the year at the Old Kirk. The next day saw us gain our first Wheatear of the year as Westness continued to produce the goods on the avian front.

We weren't finished there, with a run of white-winged gulls starting on 20th with a lone Glaucous Gull at Scottigar, this was followed by two other birds and the original bird all around the north end, while an Iceland Gull fed off Brides in the afternoon. The 21st saw another Stonechat at Peckhole and the 23rd was populated by a little influx of Goldcrests into the island with birds at Holland and the Surgery.

Plate 120. Iceland Gull, North Ronaldsay, 24 February 2022. © *George Gay*

Plate 121. Snow Bunting, North Ronaldsay, 29 March 2022. © *George Gay*

The 24th started strongly with the first Greenfinch of the year seen around the back end of Trap 3, not a significant sighting for most UK observatories but it's one that has nearly been missed in previous years. Two Wheatear on the Links were the other highlight offered by the day's birding.

The following day would see the first Dunnock, another good year-list addition, at Bewan House feeding on the outside of the dyke. The first Puffins of the year passed at sea, but birds weren't the highlight of the day. A repeat visit, albeit a short one, from the Orca pod known as 27's, when they passed the north end of the island and stole the show.

A quieter day on 26th gave little to shout about but the following day was much better with three year ticks in total. The first was a Siskin as it flew south down the island and out over the observatory. It was followed by a Goldfinch at the War Memorial which again flew south down the island and briefly settled in Holland. The third year tick was a distant White-billed Diver from the north end, hopefully a closer encounter will follow in the coming weeks. The day was rounded off by a Carrion Crow at Trolla and a Rook at Claypows in the afternoon.

The 28th saw the re-appearance of Short-eared Owls at Peckhole, whether they're the same birds or different we'll never know, but at least two were present until the close of the month. The only year-list addition was a Collared Dove that made a very fleeting visit into the gardens at Holland.

The final date and bird of interest for this write-up was a summer-plumaged Black-throated Diver off Haskie in the afternoon on 30th. With April and the rest of spring just around the corner we're pretty excited about what's to come.

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Moult and behaviour: a guide to identifying juvenile Honey-buzzards on their Scottish breeding grounds

C.J. McINERNY, K.D. SHAW & K. HOEY

Introduction

The Honey-buzzard *Pernis apivorus* is a rare and elusive breeder in Scotland (McInerny & Shaw 2019, McInerny & Shaw 2022). However, a national survey during 2020–2021 revealed that it is not as rare as once thought with the species breeding in at least eight and probably 12 recording areas across the country (Clements *et al.* 2022, McInerny *et al.* 2022).

In recent times an increasing number of Scottish ornithologists have seen Honey-buzzards, with some lucky enough to watch their spectacular display when they perform the butterfly wing-clapping flight over woodland territories. However, confirming successful breeding of the species is difficult although this has been achieved in a number of Scottish recording areas with some nest sites being found only in the past few years (Clements *et al.* 2022, McInerny *et al.* 2022).

Locating and observing nests through the breeding season, sometimes with trail cameras, is the most conclusive way to confirm breeding (Roberts & Law 2014, McInerny *et al.* 2020). However, this requires a Schedule 1 Licence issued by NatureScot (2021), and is very time consuming. Hence, many Honey-buzzard workers achieve this for just a small proportion of the pairs that they monitor.

In contrast, finding, identifying and studying fledged and flying juveniles is a more accessible way to confirm breeding. Importantly, as long as observers do not approach nests and restrict themselves to viewing birds from a distance (Shaw *et al.* 2021), a Schedule 1 Licence is not required. However, the 'window' of dates to observe flying juveniles is short and some skill and experience of birds of this age class is required to recognise them.

Many authors have commented on how difficult juvenile Honey-buzzards are to identify and how very different they are from adults (Forsman 2016, Shaw *et al.* 2019). In this short paper we describe the 'window' of activity dates for flying juvenile Honey-buzzards and describe the most often seen colour morphs seen in Scotland. Furthermore, we demonstrate the importance of studying feather moult to allow identifying birds of this age class. Finally, we describe the behaviour of juveniles near nests which assists their identification. We hope that this information will encourage observers to look for and find juvenile Honey-buzzards in Scotland and so allow new areas in which the species breed to be found.

'Window' of activity: when to look for flying juvenile Honey-buzzards

Honey-buzzards are trans-equatorial migrants spending the winter months in sub-Saharan Africa and the summer in the Western Palearctic where they breed. Birds in Scotland return to their breeding grounds from mid-May (McInerny *et al.* 2018a, McInerny & Shaw 2022); such birds will be at least three years old as juveniles spend two years in Africa before returning to Europe (Gamauf & Friedl 2011).

In Scotland breeding commences from late May to early June, with hatched young on the nest from late June (Forrester *et al.* 2007). Hardey *et al.* (2013) describe a period from late July to late September as the time for fledged Honey-buzzards. In our work in central Scotland we have noted juveniles flying above the tree canopy from 17 August until 11 September (McInerny & Shaw 2018, McInerny & Shaw 2022). We therefore recommend that Honey-buzzard watchers search for fledged flying juveniles in potential breeding areas from 12 August until the 12 September.

Plate 122 a–b. Juvenile Honey-buzzard, west central Scotland, 22 August 2021. This is a dark morph bird, the colour form most commonly seen in juveniles in Scotland. It shows no obvious feather loss, however, some feather abrasion to the tips of the tail feathers is apparent, and one of the central tail feathers was damaged, where the barbs were stripped from the shaft about halfway down, creating the gap in the tail. This damage occurred to the newly grown feathers when the bird perched on branches near the nest, during the so-called 'branching' phase. © *Keith Hoey*

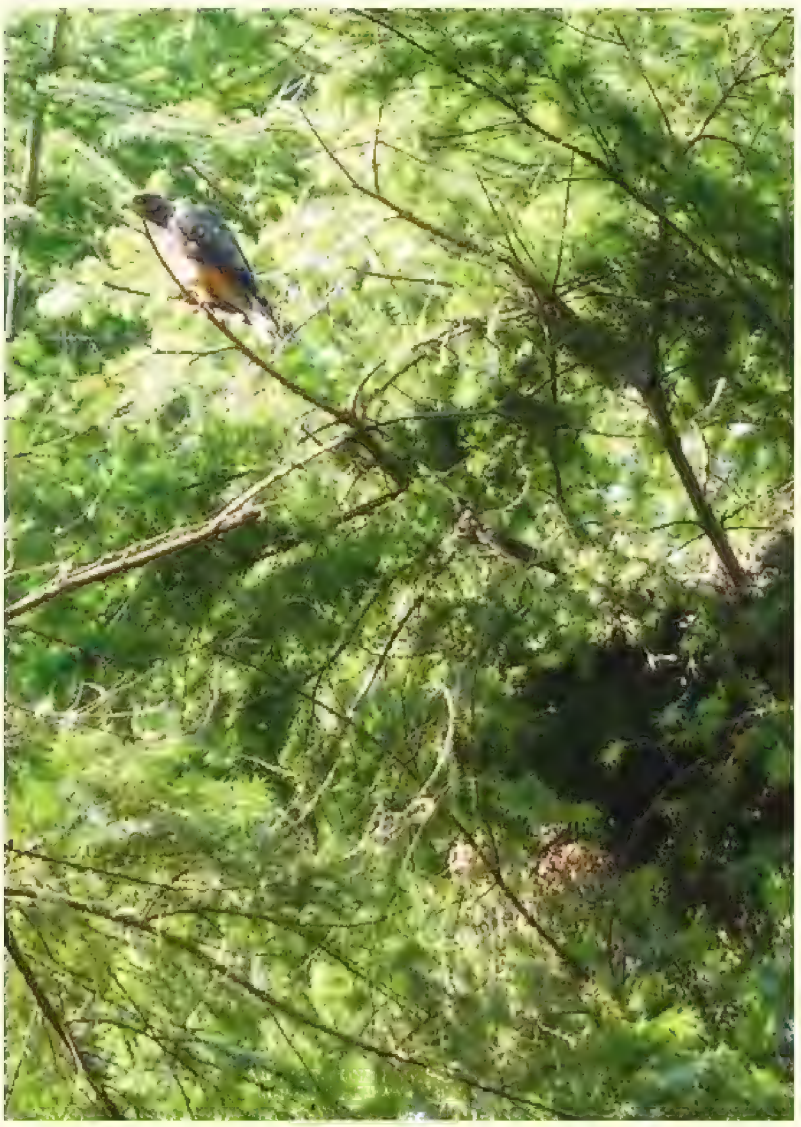

Plate 123. Juvenile Honey-buzzard 'branching' next to its nest, north Scotland, 27 August 2021. This is a more unusual pale morph bird that shows dark eye masks. © *Stuart Benn*

Colour morphs of juvenile Honey-buzzards

As with adult males, the colour of juvenile Honey-buzzards varies greatly from very pale to dark brown (Forsman 2016). In central Scotland most juveniles are dark brown, consistent with observations elsewhere in Europe where 90% of juveniles are this colour morph (Plate 122, Shaw *et al.* 2019; McInerny & Shaw 2022). Pairs tend to produce similarly coloured young (Harwood & Richman 2016, R. Clements, A. Little & K. Little pers. comm., our observations), although different colour morphs can be found in the same nest (McInerny *et al.* 2018b).

Pale juveniles are relatively easy to identify being very distinctive, sometimes even having dark eye masks (Plate 123), but dark brown birds are much more difficult being very similar to juvenile Common Buzzards *Buteo buteo*. Indeed, it has been suggested that the appearance of such dark birds is an evolutionary adaptation so that they appear like juvenile Common Buzzards as a form of protection (Duff 2006). We described the plumage and structural features used to identify juveniles elsewhere (Shaw *et al.* 2019), so will not repeat them here, but instead focus on feather moult and damage, and behaviour.

Feather moult and damage of juvenile Honey-buzzards

Both male and female Honey-buzzards initiate moult of flight feathers on their breeding grounds, with both tail and inner primary feathers lost and regrown (Shaw *et al.* 2017).

Females start moulting when they begin incubation in early June, but by the middle of the summer, July and August, both males and females are more obviously losing inner primary and tail feathers (Plate 124a). However, as the season progresses 'feather gaps' become less obvious as new feathers regrow to replace them (Plate 124b). In some cases, feather regrowth is suspended in late August and early September as birds undergo their autumn migration to Africa.

Additionally, both males and females routinely damage feathers during the breeding season. Such damage can be noticeable when large pieces of feathers are missing; on other occasions it is more subtle, only revealed by close views or high-resolution photography (Plate 124b). This feather damage likely occurs when birds dig holes in the ground to find wasp nests, or move through branches of coniferous trees that have spiky, sharp leaves and branches.

In contrast, juvenile Honey-buzzards have not moulted feathers when they are first seen flying above the canopy as the feathers are newly grown. Hence, they are sometimes described a 'pristine', although this is not always the case as broken feathers can be observed, both in the wings and the tail, with this occurring when birds perch on branches near nests, so-called 'branching' (Plate 122, McInerny *et al.* 2021).

Hence, the absence of damaged or missing feathers is a suggestion that a bird is a juvenile Honey-buzzard, although care should be taken to eliminate juvenile Common Buzzards which also, for the same reasons, have fresh feathers and show little feather loss and damage.

Behaviour of juvenile Honey-buzzards

The behaviour of fledged juvenile Honey-buzzards is an important aid to allow their identification as they can behave in a distinct and different way to Common Buzzards.

Fledged juveniles do not wander far from nests until they start migration and are dependent on adults. Initially juveniles only fly short distances from the nest, sitting for long periods on nearby branches, waiting for parents to return with food which is placed on the nest and to which the young fly. After a few days of such 'branching', the young gain strength and confidence, and fly further and above the tree canopy.

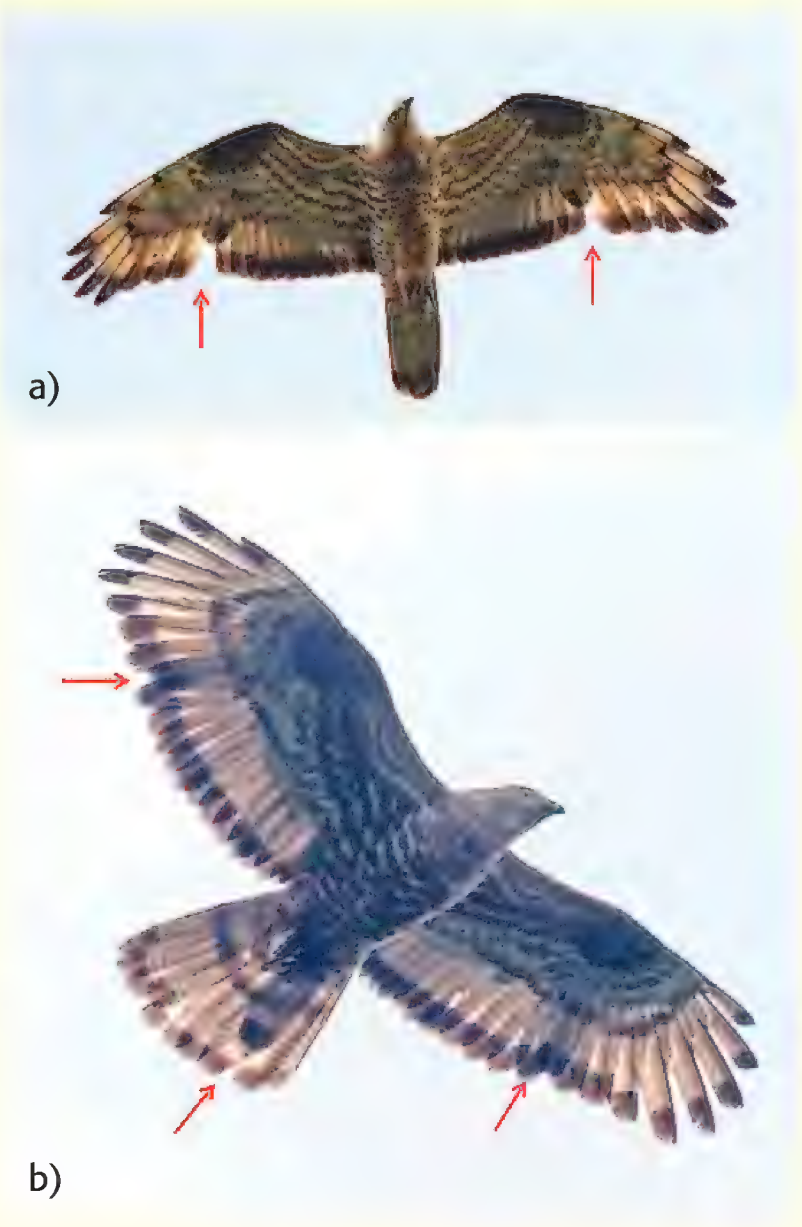

Plate 124 a–b. Two adult male Honey-buzzards, east central Scotland, 19 July 2018 (a) and 1 August 2018 (b). Both birds show feather moult and regrowth, and are the typical pale grey morphs seen in the region. The inner primary feather loss is more obvious in the upper bird (a); in the lower bird (b) the lost primary and tail feathers have mostly regrown. Lost and regrown feathers are indicated by red arrows. © *John Anderson*

It has been reported that juveniles are seldom seen flying above the canopy (Roberts & Law 2014). However, in central Scotland we have noted juveniles regularly flying above the canopy between 17 August and 11 September in 12 different territories with an average of six observations per year over a six-year period. On these occasions juvenile Honey-buzzards have been watched flying either by themselves, with an adult Honey-buzzard, with another juvenile Honey-buzzard, with Common Buzzards, or being harassed by Goshawks *Accipiter gentilis*, particularly juvenile females.

We have observed various distinctive behaviours of juvenile Honey-buzzards that can be useful for their identification. As described, when juveniles gain enough confidence and strength they fly around the nest area, initially between trees. At this stage, as well as learning to fly, they learn to land, this revealed by birds sometimes landing poorly, 'crashing' onto trees and branches, with much wing-flapping, reminiscent of juvenile Long-eared Owls *Asio otus* (J. Steele pers. comm., our observations). During this period they can also fly with parents, not only low over trees, sometimes far from the nest, but with increasing assurance higher in the sky, occasionally for extended periods of up a few hours. It appears that parents fly with juveniles to impart confidence and to teach them to fly, with sometimes the parent performing the butterfly wing-clapping to the juvenile. Such dual flying lasts only a few days before the parents leave to migrate to wintering areas usually in the last week of August, with on some occasions the juveniles disappearing at the same time, although it appears that the young do not migrate with their parents (Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001, McInerny *et al.* 2021). It has also been suggested that in some pairs one adult departs on migration leaving the other to tend the fledged young (Roberts & Law 2014).

Many juveniles remain after the parents have left breeding areas. It is during this period in early September, in the absence of parents, that we have observed juvenile Honey-buzzards fly with Common Buzzards on a number of occasions. Therefore it is important to scrutinise groups of flying 'buzzards' in early September in potential breeding areas. As noted, dark morph juvenile Honey-buzzards are very similar to juvenile Common Buzzards so groups of buzzards should be looked at carefully. This association can continue during migration as birds of the two species have been observed flying together (Cramp & Simmons 1980, del Hoyo *et al.* 1994, McInerny 2008).

Acknowledgements

We thank our co-workers whom we have collaborated with on this aspect of Honey-buzzard biology and behaviour: Dave Anderson, John Anderson, Stuart Benn, Kris Gibb, the late Ray Hawley, Ali Little, Kenny Little, Gareth Mason, Carol Miller, Duncan Orr-Ewing, Jim Steele, Logan Steele and Andrew Whewell. We thank John Anderson and Stuart Benn for use of their photographic images.

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Ring-billed Gulls in Scotland – an interesting case study

J.S. NADIN & K. HOEY

There have been several long-staying Ring-billed Gulls in Scotland over the last thirty years, notably a bird at Oban (Argyll) which returned for nine years. Another adult at Dingwall, Highland which returned for thirteen years, and finally a bird that returned to Stromness on Orkney mainland for an impressive twenty-one years.

Currently, the only known long returning Ring-billed Gull remaining in Scotland is a bird that first visited Strathclyde Loch in 2008 and which was still present in February 2022. It has been a regular visitor to Strathclyde Country Park during the winter months December/January–February/March, often seen coming to bread off carpark number four.

There has also been an adult bird in an upland Common Gull breeding colony in Perth & Kinross (first reported in June 2009) and still returning to the same breeding colony in spring 2022. We wondered if these could in fact be one and the same?

In 2018 we began comparing photographs from the two sites to see if we could find a conclusive match, using a combination of features to do this. However, this is far from easy and requires either careful study and sketches in the field, or scrutiny using good quality photographs of the birds in flight and at rest, as we did.

The criteria we employed involved comparing the overall size and structure of the birds, the size and shape of the bill, the black pattern in the wing especially on P5–P10, the size and shape of the white primary mirrors on P9 & P10 on both wings. Finally, the important fine detail of the black bill band, which we believe, can act almost like a human finger print. This requires clear close-up photographs of the bill to enable this to be achieved.

We examined the wing-tip patterns and found there was clearly a degree of variability through moult and over time; wear has also to be taken into account. The

Plate 125. Adult winter Ring-billed Gull, Strathclyde Loch, February 2016. © *Keith Hoey*

Plate 126. Ring-billed Gull, upland breeding site, Perth & Kinross, June 2009 © *John Nadin*

large mirror on P10 remained fairly constant, but the smaller mirrors on P9 were slightly more variable. In general, the mirror on P9 on the left wing was always more apparent, from being obvious in the field to sometimes being barely visible in some photographs. On the right wing the P9 mirror was less obvious, often difficult to see in the field or sometimes absent altogether. There was also variability in the amount of black on P5–P10, the small wing tip black band on P5 was never exactly the same year on year, sometimes being broken or incomplete.

We found there is a marked difference in the wing-tip patterns from one individual to another. Some birds have large white mirrors on P9 with others showing none at all. This helped us discount other Ring-billed Gulls seen over the same time period, notably birds seen in Dundee (Angus) in 2009 and Dunfermline (Fife) in 2015.

We found both birds in Clyde & P&K looked very similar in size and structure, both were big, we believe a male based on size and observed interactions with Common Gulls at the breeding colony. The leg size and colour looked identical, the bill size (big-billed) and the black band bill pattern looked the same (see plate 128). The primary detail also showed a match with a very small mirror on P9 on the left-hand wing and absent on the right-hand wing. The detail of the black feathering in P5 through P10 also matched very closely.

These comparisons helped us confirm the Strathclyde Loch individual (2008–2009 & 2014–2022) and the upland breeding site bird (2009–2022) are indeed the same bird. On further checking of images, we were also able to match the bird present in Fife at Newburgh (28 February–22 March 2014) as being this same individual too using the same criteria.

See below a series of images from Strathclyde Loch, Newburgh and the upland breeding site in P&K that helped to confirm they are all the same individual.

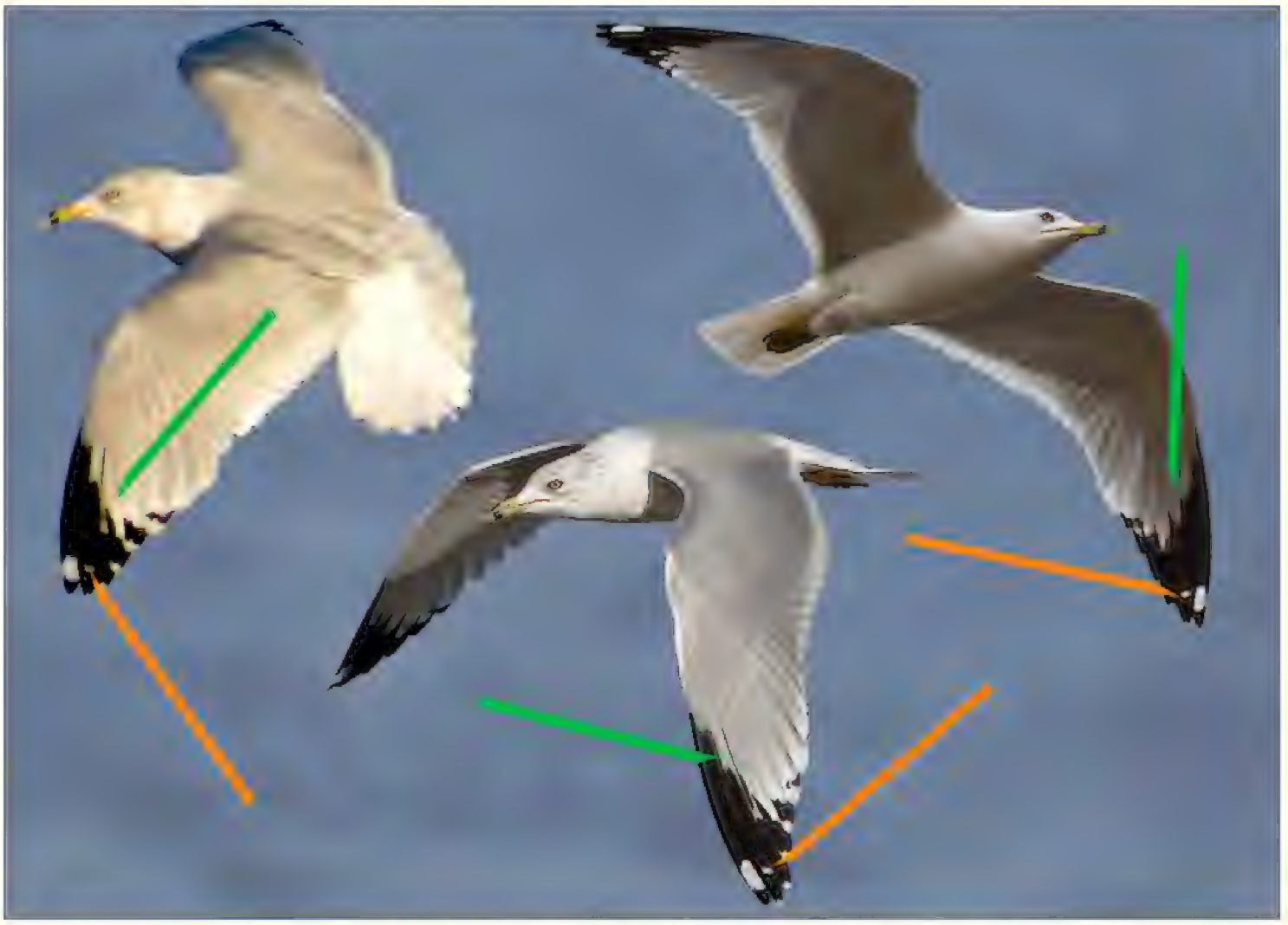

Plate 127. Flight photomontage showing P9 mirror on left wing (orange lines) and detail of primary pattern (green lines) on birds from Strathclyde Loch, Clyde, December 2017. © John Nadin. Newburgh, Fife, March 2014. © Willie McBay. And the upland breeding site, Perth & Kinross, April 2018. © *Keith Hoey*

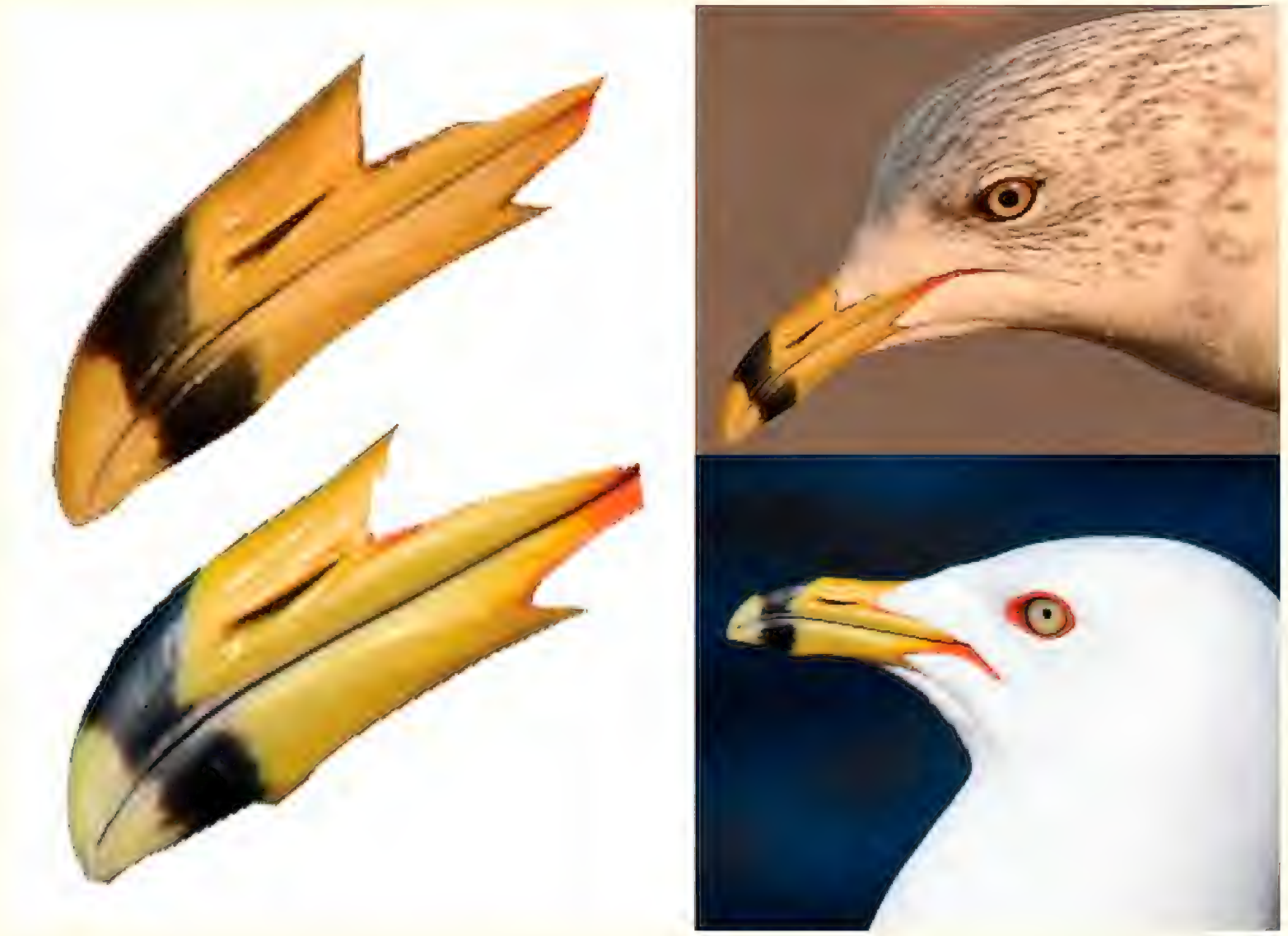

Plate 128. Bill band pattern match photomontage from Strathclyde Loch, January 2018, and upland breeding site Perth & Kinross, May 2018. © *Keith Hoey*

Plate 129. Strathclyde Loch, Clyde, showing primary pattern on open wings, December 2014. © *Keith Hoey*

Plate 130. Strathclyde Loch, Clyde, showing primary detail on both wings, December 2014. © Keith Hoey

Plate 131. Ring-billed Gull showing left wing detail, Newburgh, Fife, March 2014. © *John Anderson*

Plate 132. Adult Ring-billed Gull showing open wing detail but note missing small mirror on P9, upland breeding site, Perth & Kinross, May 2021. © *Mark Wilkinson*

Plate 133. Adult Ring-billed Gull at upland breeding site, Perth & Kinross, May 2019. © *John Nadin*

Plate 134. Ring-billed Gull on eggs at upland breeding site, Perth & Kinross, May 2016. © *A. Kidd*

Plate 135. Ring-billed Gull on eggs at upland breeding site, Perth & Kinross, June 2017. © *John Nadin*

Plate 136. Displaying adult Ring-billed Gull, at upland breeding site, Perth & Kinross, April 2021. © *John Nadin*

This bird must now be a minimum of 17 years old as it was first recorded in 2008 as an adult (in Clyde), making it the second longest stayer in Scotland to date behind the Orkney bird. The normal longevity for the species is given as 3–10 years, but the current oldest bird recorded is 28 years old from Ohio. However, this is clearly an exceptional individual.

As yet, there is no known evidence that this bird has produced any hybrid young from mixed pairings with Common Gulls at the upland site in P&K. The earliest arrival date at the upland breeding site is 6 March, with the latest departure date being 20 July. It has been observed at least three times sitting on nests (in different years 2009, 2016, 2017 (see plates 134 & 135)) containing eggs and paired with a Common Gull.

Plate 137. Ring-billed Gull on nest, April 2018. © *Keith Hoey*. One possible explanation for the lack of hybrid young is egg/chick predation, by Otters - one nest that contained eggs was abandoned with no eggs remaining but clear signs of an Otter were observed with spraints seen very near the nest. A large dog Otter was seen on the shore this year, being mobbed by many Common Gulls and the Ring-billed Gull, all trying to move it away from their nesting areas. Lesser Black-backed Gulls have increased around the breeding site, this could also have an affect on breeding success due to predation. Human disturbance can also be an issue, we have observed people keeping birds off their nests for long periods. In recent breeding seasons, detailed observations have been limited due to COVID-19 restrictions, but the Ring-billed Gull has appeared unpaired, often sitting on its own on the rocky shoreline. It still holds territory and displays loudly to any passing Common Gulls (see plate 136) but appears to have been unsuccessful at obtaining a mate in the last few breeding seasons.

Plate 138. Ring-billed Gull in breeding plumage at upland breeding site, Perth & Kinross, April 2021. © *John Nadin*

There are several unanswered questions in respect of its movements in Scotland. It appears to leave the breeding colony in July, but does not turn up back at Strathclyde Loch until late December or early January. So does go unobserved for over five months. The one visit to Fife is the only confirmed sighting away from the main two core areas, so it will be interesting to see if any of its other whereabouts are ever discovered in future years.

If there are any more long-staying Ring-billed Gulls (perhaps recent Lothian birds) recorded in Scotland in future years we would encourage observers to check any inland Common Gull colonies just in case there are further breeding attempts to be recorded and monitored on this side of the Atlantic.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the people who helped and encouraged us to write up this article and especially John Anderson, Alex Kidd, Willie McBay and Mark Wilkinson for their fine photographs and Kris Gibb for his comparison photomontages.

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Plate 139. Baikal Teal, Fair Isle, 29 September 2021. © *Alex Penn*

Baikal Teal, Fair Isle, 29 September 2021 – first record for Scotland

D. SHAW

It was Wednesday 29 September 2021, and I was enduring a rockin' and rollin' day on the *Good Shepherd* (the infamous Fair Isle ferry on which I am part of the crew), when I received the gutting news that there was a White's Thrush on Fair Isle... and then that they'd trapped it! Oh how I'd love to see a (live) White's Thrush in the hand - I had spent many an hour years ago staring at the stuffed one (shot by 'Myers' Jimmy in 1944) in a glass case at the end of the Obs bar... and then had come closer still in 2007 when a set of wings and breast bone from a fresh Peregrine kill were found. I've seen several White's Thrushes on Fair Isle over the years, and it is not the mystical rarity it once was, but still they really are stunning birds and I would always make the effort to see one when it turned up.

By the time I'd got home from the boat it was nearly 17:00 hrs, so I had a cup of tea and a catch up with my wife, Hollie (and number two son, Fyntan on the phone). The dogs were pestering me so I thought I'd better take them for a walk. We went as far as the Kirk, then I decided we'd walk along the fence-line by Da Water - see if we could kick up a Lanceolated Warbler. I noticed a number of ducks on the main pool and stopped to scan through them with my binoculars... a fair few Teal and Wigeon and a handful of Mallard, then one oddity! It was slightly larger than the Teal but smaller than the Wigeon with a pale head and neck... and was that actually a pale spot on its face at the base of the bill? From memory that meant Garganey, Blue-winged Teal or Baikal Teal. I'd seen Garganey before and quickly ruled that out, it was too dark and rest of face pattern wasn't right.

Just then Mac (dog) ran past me towards the pool and put everything up. I remained focused on the bird and took in more features... size, shape and most importantly wing pattern – a narrow black/green speculum with just a broad white trailing edge (no mid-wing white stripe) – a pattern that (of the candidates) only fitted Baikal Teal! Thankfully, although some of the birds disappeared, the one in question landed back on the pool. I backed off with the dogs to the Kirk and WhatsApp'd the news out. I was quickly joined by Dan Gornall on foot and then Alex Penn and Georgia Platt arrived in a car, with a telescope. As the 'crowd' amassed (a total of ten people) telescope views and zoomed-in photographs confirmed my suspicions - a first Baikal Teal for Shetland!

Plate 140. Baikal Teal (top right) with Teal, Fair Isle, 29 September 2021. © *Alex Penn*

Next morning the Baikal Teal was still present, although rather flighty, but strong winds meant no twitchers could get in. I did catch up with the White's Thrush however - what a bird!

Description

A smallish duck, superficially resembling Eurasian Teal but slightly larger (but smaller than Wigeon) with a different profile (especially in flight), having a slightly more pot-bellied appearance and a larger head/thicker neck and longer sloping forehead and bill. **Head:** At distance, pale grey face, chin and neck contrasted with rest of body which was darker. Slightly closer examination showed a distinctive white spot on the face at the base of the bill and a broad dark line behind the eye. From photos, the white facial spot was separated from the pale greyish face by a thick darker grey-brown border. The crown was dark brown, below which there was a distinctive thin pale grey line from the rear of the eye reaching back to the nape. The broader brown stripe (same colour as crown) along its lower border made it stand out. Photos showed there may have been a faint grey line from throat towards cheek (bisecting the pale grey face) and looping over ear coverts, but this was not obvious with binoculars at the distance viewed. Bill appeared all dark (lacking any orange cutting edge), but slightly paler grey at base. **Upperparts:** At rest appeared similar in colour to Eurasian Teal. In flight the wing pattern was different to the accompanying Eurasian Teal, in lacking a white mid-wing stripe (instead having a narrow cinnamon stripe - sometimes visible but not obvious in the field) and having a much narrower speculum but a noticeably broader white trailing edge. The speculum usually appeared black rather than green, which may be a factor of the dull light and that it was fairly narrow, not being much wider than the white trailing edge for the most part. It was widest at its outer edge narrowing as it reached the body. Photos showed that the mantle was brown and fairly plain and the rump was greyer with some darker mottling. The tail was also similar to Eurasian Teal being grey-brown although one photo appears to show two older bleached feathers on the left side. **Underparts:** Similar to Eurasian Teal with grey-brown mottled flanks and breast and a paler belly viewable in flight. Distinct cut off from pale grey neck and dark mottled breast. Undertail coverts not noted but a photo on the first evening seemed to show the right side to have a cinnamon feather or two (indicating a male?) whilst (from later photos) on the left side these appeared whitish - although I never got the chance to confirm this in the field.

A calmer start on 1 October meant Shetland birders could get in, and although the Baikal Teal had not been seen, with so many extra eyes and feet on the isle it was soon relocated, amongst a flock of Wigeon on Meoness. It was lovely to see so many familiar faces (in these times of COVID-19 lockdowns) and it was a shame they couldn't stay longer but they ticked the bird and were off again. The bird was becoming very mobile by

Plate 141. Baikal Teal, Fair Isle, 29 September 2021. © *Alex Penn*

now and was only seen briefly a few times after this, often alone or with a few Eurasian Teal - it was last seen on 4 October.

I later spoke to Roger Riddington about this bird and he kindly contacted Sébastien Reeber (who wrote the excellent Helm Guide: Wildfowl of Europe, Asia and North America) and sent him Alex Penn's photos (which accompany this article). He replied with some very instructive comments...

Plate 142. Baikal Teal, Fair Isle, 29 September 2021. © *Alex Penn*

"Overall plumage and moult: *by late September and early October, a young bird would most probably be in full juvenile plumage (apart from the possibility of an auxiliary moult, which may occur before the post-juvenile moult). The post-juvenile moult occurs clearly later in the Baikal Teal (and other East-Asian dabbling ducks) than in west European species. By early October, some adult males already show obvious signs of the new breeding plumage, but not all of them. Of course, a vagrant bird may also have stopped its moult just after the wing moult. So, I guess that the overall moult appearance is not very useful here...*

Head pattern: *the dark cap reaches the eye, which is surrounded by a blackish area, especially in front of it and under it. This is better for an adult. In juveniles, the whitish supercilium usually passes above the eye and the eye-patch is less striking. Also, the pictures show a hint of a dark bar running down from the eye across the cheeks. This is also good for an adult.*

Scapulars: *The longest scapulars are much better for an adult male, being long, pointed with a neat inner pale tongue and a broad buff outer edge. The other scapulars are also quite broad near the tip and without pale edges, not pointed or frayed. I can't really see the lower rank of scapulars here, but they are typically squared at tip in adults and pointed in juveniles.*

Tertials: *The black line along the outer edge of the two outermost tertials somewhat differs between adults and juveniles (the white line indicates the sex). The black line is shorter but broader in the adult, thinner and longer in the juvenile. On the outermost tertial, the black line is usually evenly thin in juveniles, whereas in adults, it broadens and then quickly narrows down. It looks like an adult here to me. In captivity at least, I usually found it to be a very useful feature.*

Tertial coverts and upperwing secondary coverts: *the photographs might be misleading, but these feathers appear broad, rounded at tip, plain grey-brown and without the pale edges typical of females and (much less obviously) young males. The tertial coverts of young males usually show a pale edge broken at the tip. It is not visible here, but again, given the blurred photograph, the exact pattern might just not be visible.*

Secondary remiges tips: *the outer feathers are not well visible here, but on the central ones, the white edge obviously runs along the inner side of the tip, which again is better for an adult. Also, the white edge of the outermost secondary, even if blurred on the photograph, appears quite broad. At last, the shape of the central secondaries can be useful too: the outer edge is regularly rounded in adult with barely a soft angle, whereas in juvenile, the outer edge marks a clear angle, then an almost concave line to the tip. The very tip (of most secondaries) has typically the shape of a teat in juveniles. Again, the Fair Isle bird looks like an adult to me.*

Speculum: *It is a useful clue too, especially the 1–3 outermost secondaries. Except for the tip, they are uniformly grey (without black or green sheen). Adults usually show one grey outer secondary (that is to say, the green sheen runs up to the second outermost one), whereas young males show 2 or 3 such grey secondaries. Based on this sole feature and given the quality of the picture, it might be better for a young bird.*

Wing bar (greater coverts): *It appears quite dark cinnamon, and looks unobvious, which might be better for an adult. On the whole, I don't find this feature very useful, being actually better for sexing juveniles (it is really paler in females than in males of both age classes).*

Rump and back: *They look greyish slightly mottled blackish, which is best for an adult. It is usually browner and more scaly in appearance in juveniles.*

Flank feathers: *the upper/rear flank feathers appear broad and regularly rounded, without inner marks, which is clearly better for an adult. Juveniles have narrower and more pointed feathers, most often with clear wedge-shaped pale inner marks. Moreover, in the picture where the bird is sleeping, it seems that there is a grey patch among the flank feathers. If that is the case, it is most probably a breeding adult plumage remnant. I wouldn't expect such a feather in a young male without any sign of moult elsewhere and so early in the autumn.*

Belly: *It looks plain whitish and well delineated, without the fine spots usually shown by young birds. It could be better for an adult again, but note that the fine spotting of juveniles is often very unobvious.*

Tail feathers: *there are two generations of feathers (one is even missing on the right side) but in my opinion the contrast is between new alternate (= moulted in spring) and old basic (= moulted in autumn, one year before) rectrices. That's usual in males Anas, as soon as 2d years, even if I don't really know what is the rule in wild Baikal Teals... I think that the two generations of feathers here do not differ in size, shape or structure. I would expect juvenile feathers to appear more obviously different. This bird will replace all its rectrices at the end of the next (prebasic=pre-breeding) moult.*

Undertail coverts: *the blackish markings are better for an adult, juveniles usually showing ill-defined or blurred pale brown smudges. Also, the pale grey barring on the sides of the rump might also be better for an adult.*

So, all in all, I'm pretty convinced that this is an adult, but of course, I would be quite interested in other opinions".

Thus it appears that this bird may in fact have been an eclipse adult male, however, that should not exclude it from being a genuine bird of wild origin, arriving as it did at the peak time for eastern vagrants and during a period of very strong south-easterly winds which also brought a White's Thrush, Daurian Shrike, Blyth's Reed Warbler, Short-toed Lark and a number of Yellow-browed Warblers to Fair Isle.

I'd like to thank Alex Penn for his superbly instructive photos which accompany this article, Sébastien Reeber for his expert knowledge and comments, Roger Riddington for his discussion and assistance and finally to Kes and Mac for getting me out the door that late afternoon!

This record has been accepted by the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC).

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Baikal Teal status in Scotland

Breeds within the forest zone of north and north-east Siberia. Migrates to winter in the Far East. Commonly kept in waterfowl collections. This species has a chequered history on the Scottish list. The first accepted British record, of a bird on Fair Isle in September 1954, was later removed from the British list following review, as there were doubts over its correct identification. Three later records, of a male (shot) at Loch Spynie, Moray & Nairn 5 February 1958, a male at Caerlaverock, Dumfries & Galloway 19 February–7 April 1973, and a male at Skinflats, Upper Forth 2 June 2019, are all currently placed in Category D. Category D is for species that would otherwise appear in Category A, except that there is a reasonable doubt that they have ever occurred in a natural state. Species placed in Category D form no part of the Scottish list, and are not included in the species totals. This record, accepted by BBRC, therefore becomes the first Scottish record.

Plate 143. Varied Thrush, Papay Westray, Orkney 28 October 2021. © *John Coutts*

Varied Thrush, Papay Westray, Orkney, 27 October–1 November 2021 – first record for Scotland

D. ROCHE

"I still dread being sent a photo from the island of some Yank mega asking, "What's this?"" That was the message I posted to my fellow comrades back on 5 October, bound for a week on the Isle of May. Having found Papay's first Western Bonelli's Warbler that same day (a species high up on my 'there's no reason why I couldn't find one of those on here' list) I was counting myself lucky that the bird had the decency to turn up when it did. A week later and I would have missed what would surely prove to be the island's bird of the autumn...

With a history of patchy island coverage, Papay has been my adopted patch since 2016, broken by a season's hiatus on Fair Isle in 2018, but with me returning to the island the following year, where I have since been permanently based. Having not been away for any length of time since early October 2020, my normal reluctance to be off island during peak migration seasons saw me head away for a break, and a change of scene, to spend ten days on Sanday in mid-September, before agreeing to an invitation, joining a team to man the Isle of May bird Observatory from 9 October. Although always very much in my mind, the fear of being off island and missing the 'big one' fortunately never came to pass.

Returning to Papay on 17 October, for what had been a month largely devoid of common migrants, a brief spell of south-east winds shortly after my return saw the autumn's first

main arrival of Redwing, with a skulking Bluethroat then appearing along the beach of the south Wick the following day. Now into the final stretch of October, the prospect of a late autumn flurry felt like it was slowly fading by the day; Goldcrests had been virtually non-existent (prior to my return I had seen just two birds!) whilst the previously unimaginable absence of Yellow-browed Warbler was looking set to (and ultimately did) become a reality. By the final week of the month I was, like doubtless many others, on the verge of almost giving up on autumn 2021.

With recent days taken up by packing and cleaning, moving out of the small flat above the Kirk, time in the field had been rather more limited than usual. Being one of those folk with multiple island jobs, the morning of the 27th saw me begin with my usual routine of walking the short distance down the road to empty the island's post box, being greeted in the process by two ringtail Hen Harriers hunting over the field opposite the Post Office, with a third bird sat on a nearby stone dyke. Later, returning for my shift in the Post Office itself, my intention of first making a short diversion to look around Links and the nearby beach found me slightly short for time, although I was still able to enjoy a sub-adult male Hen Harrier passing over the same field. With birds in previous winters having roosted together in a small patch of reeds, just behind the house of Links, a late afternoon wander to see what might come in seemed well overdue. Though ringtail Hen Harriers are a daily sight, adult males are typically very erratic in their appearances, often not being seen for weeks at a time. Curious to see what might end up coming in to roost, I set off with my girlfriend just after 16:30 hrs to make the short walk down the road.

Situated just above the NE corner of Tredwell Loch, we turned off the road to walk down the track to the house of Links where, being about half way down, I noticed a lone thrush feeding on the small lawn just behind the garage, some 50–100 m away. Thinking nothing of it, but still raising the bins to check out what I naturally assumed would prove to be a Redwing, found me instantly reduced to a hyper-ventilating wreck.

Plate 144. Varied Thrush, Papay Westray, Orkney 27 October 2021. © *David Roche*

Plate 145. A crowd gathers to watch the Varied Thrush, Papay Westray, Orkney 27 October 2021. © *David Roche*

Plate 146. Varied Thrush, Papay Westray, Orkney 28 October 2021. © *John Coutts*

Falling to the ground, grabbing the camera out of my bag and delegating Papay broadcasting news duties to Claire, it was all too startlingly clear as to what I was watching, even if my own eyes were refusing to believe it. Worrying that the significance of the original WhatsApp message may have not been fully realised (one recipient quite understandably confessed to initially reading of a "variety of Thrushes" around the garden of Links) "Varied Thrush Links garden" was swiftly upgraded to the somewhat more urgent message of "F***ING VARIED THRUSH. 2nd BRITISH RECORD". Papay ranger Jonathan Ford was first to arrive, later followed by Neil and Jocelyn Rendall with Tim Dodman and Jennifer Foley also arriving in the fading light, as the bird continued to feed on the open lawns just outside the house. Later, explaining the enormity of the record to Sue and Tony Curtis, both of whom had been away from the house when we arrived and were happy for me to release the news, Jonathan's mock prediction of the bird having already "been around for ages" was found to be very much a reality when I showed my photos to Sue... "Oh, that's been here at least a week!" Watching until near darkness, my always-hoped-for Papay American passerine had become a reality, albeit only realised in the final few minutes before returning home, where I broadcast the news to the wider world, opened the whisky, watched Twitter explode to life and attempted (very much the operative word here) to sleep.

Returning at first light, I found the bird still present, with the first local birders arriving from Westray on the early morning school boat, shortly followed by the first chartered flights and boats coming direct from Kirkwall. Though occasionally going unseen, where it would sometimes feed among compost heaps in an out of view compound at the back of the house, the bird remained remarkably faithful to the front lawns, rarely straying far from the house and regularly offering extended views, often at close range.

With the wind staying largely in the south for the duration of the birds stay, a change to the north-west on the night of 1 November saw it depart overnight, much to the disappointment of those arriving the following day. A showy Grey Phalarope, feeding in a small pool next to the Knap of Howar, did its best to provide a small level of comforting support. Sadly, a Blyth's Reed Warbler which appeared in front of me around Holland Farm proved far less obliging and disappeared without trace after just a few minutes. In total, just over £1,300 was raised through donations, with the combination of funds to be split between the island community and Bird Conservation Nepal, promoting education and sustainability through the Ranibari Community Forest Project and its role as a bird and biodiversity community learning centre.

Though the island may not be able to claim such regular scarce migrants as the likes of North Ronaldsay, increased observer effort has more than aptly demonstrated its potential for rare vagrants. With many parts of Orkney crying out for more coverage, it is impossible not to fantasise about what else could be unearthed, were more visiting birders to divert from our neighbours in the north and explore new ground...

This record is subject to acceptance by the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC).

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Varied Thrush status in Scotland

Breeds from Alaska to south-western Alberta, northern Idaho and north-western California. Winters mostly within its breeding range, east to Montana and southern Baja California. With such a westerly distribution, not surprisingly this is the first record for Scotland, and only the second for Britain. The only other British record concerned an extremely rare aberrant form, lacking the usual orange pigmentation, at Nanquidno, Cornwall 14–23 November 1982. Within the Western Palearctic, there is a single further record at Hjaltastaðaþinghá, Iceland 03–08 May 2004.

Plate 147. Varied Thrush, Papay Westray, Orkney 28 October 2021. © *John Coutts*

Plate 148. Eyebrowed Thrush, Kincraig, Highland, 28 October 2021. © *Keith Ringland*

Eyebrowed Thrush at Kincraig, 28 October–1 November 2021 – first record for Highland

K. RINGLAND

I live in Kincraig near Aviemore in the Scottish Highlands. I work as a full-time photographer and film-maker, and while I do a lot of conventional business photography, wildlife is my favourite subject.

Within our garden we have three Rowan trees, which usually produce a good crop of berries. These invariably attract Redwings and Fieldfares. This year's berry crop was particularly good, but by the last week of October there had still been no sign of thrushes eating them. Then I noticed a few Redwings on 26 October, so I set up a hide to allow me to film them.

The light was perfect on 28th, so I went into the hide and proceeded to film the activity. The Redwings would fly in, quickly gobble a few berries and then fly away again. This may be a deliberate tactic to minimise the chances of being caught by a Sparrowhawk. A few Blackbirds appeared as well and two Mistle Thrushes joined the fray. Then I noticed a bird that looked different.

It had an eye-stripe and brownish back, like a Redwing, but it also had a grey head and no breast streaking. Instead of the latter it had an orange-buff upper breast with a white belly. I had never seen a bird like this before, so I filmed it to identify later. I wondered could it have been some unusual plumage variant or even a hybrid.

After filming, I went in to check on its identity and it stood out as a perfect fit for an Eyebrowed Thrush. I sent a photo to the local Highland Bird Recorder and he concurred with my conclusion.

I found the bird to be quite relaxed and unhurried in feeding, unlike the Redwings. After identifying it, I hoped to get some more footage of it, but it never came back. A day or two later, the Fieldfares had also arrived, but I simply thought the Eyebrowed Thrush must have moved on.

The weather was very wet over the next few days, but local birders checking out the Redwings in another part of the village encountered the thrush again. As I write, there are other birders racing to the village to see if they can spot it before it moves on. A very nice bird to see!

This record is subject to acceptance by the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC).

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Eyebrowed Thrush status in Scotland

Breeds from Central Siberia, eastwards to the Sea of Okhotsk, south to Lake Baikal and possibly Mongolia, and northern Japan. Winters from southern Japan to Indonesia and the Philippines.

Up to and including 2020, there have been 26 British records of this eastern thrush, of which 15 (58%) have been found in Scotland (three in spring, 12 in autumn). However, since 2001, eight out of the nine British records (89%) have been in Scotland, perhaps reflecting increased coverage of the Northern Isles in recent years. On the Scottish mainland, this species remains an extremely rare vagrant, with just three previous records (Lochwinnoch, Clyde 22 October 1978, Newburgh, North-East Scotland 27 May 1981 and Auchmithie, Angus & Dundee 28–30 May 1995). The remaining records are split between the offshore islands; Outer Hebrides (2), Orkney (4), Shetland (4) and Fair Isle (2).

Nutcracker, Dunnet Bay, 10 November 2021 – first record for Caithness

R. HUGHES

I walk the same birding route most mornings from our house in Castletown to Dunnet Bay and around the woods. It had been very productive with a Grey Phalarope and Leach's Petrel a few days previously and the week before I was ecstatic with my first patch Great Spotted Woodpecker. On 10 November, as I was leaving the far end of the patch, a Lapland Bunting flew over calling, only my second for the patch this year. I remember my friend Marc Hughes saying about patch birding when I was younger, something along the lines of "you need twenty patch visits to get a good bird or have an extra special visit". That could be a monster, local rarity, patch rarity, or much more likely an interesting looking bird, an unusually high count or a good fall. Delighted with this little nugget of a Lapland Bunting, I was happy with several good birds in my 20 visits and continued along the bay road to the track that takes me back to the house.

As I got to the track, and stepped around a large boulder placed to stop vehicles going down it, while keeping an eye on my footing, I was vaguely aware that a bird had taken off from in front of me. A couple of steps further, I heard a distinct call from behind a low obscuring tree that was reminiscent of a Jay. In that moment, I thought to myself, Jay would be amazing for the patch, having only seen one in Caithness previously, which was the county's second record - three years ago in the south of the county. I knew it was close, as it was still calling, so I crept around a low tree. To my surprise, I could see that it wasn't the brightly coloured Jay I was expecting, but what was it? Lifting my bins, I was stunned to see a Nutcracker! No need to even think about confusion species, there is a Nutcracker staring at me from just 20 m away! After a stare-off, the bird casually hopped up the Sycamore branches flashing its distinctive white-tail tips at me, ending up at the top of the tree, and subtly flies off. The white spotting on the brown back colour was so smart, and having only seen images of Nutcracker before, I hadn't imagined it being as big and bulky as it was.

It all then started to sink in... what had I just seen... whilst phoning Nina (who was stuck in a meeting) I realise my legs have gone to jelly and I'm having to lean against a wall. I'm then sending panicky messages to the local WhatsApp group and Twitter. It was only later that I heard from the people who'd phoned me, that my voice had gone quivery too. I've spent hours walking in forests in Finland, Latvia and Austria looking for Nutcracker and never been lucky enough to see one. I would never have expected to find one on my local patch - it wasn't on the radar at all. There are certain species that your mind wanders to finding on the quieter days, but Nutcracker had certainly never featured.

Unfortunately, despite searching the local woods, leaving peanuts and apples at the site and loading up our bird feeders, the bird didn't return. There aren't too many birders in Caithness, so I'm particularly grateful to Peter Stronach and Bob Swann for coming straight up from the Highlands to help in the relocation effort. During December, I heard a couple of reports that a Nutcracker had visited feeders not far south of where the bird was originally found but that it was being supressed. Unfortunately, no photos or confirmation came through from these reports, which had sounded promising at the time.

This record has been accepted by the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC).

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Nutcracker status in Scotland

Two Nutcrackers were found in Scotland during October 1868 and were the only British representatives of a small influx into Scandinavia and Europe that year. One was shot on Sanday, Orkney, on 1 October, while the other was taken at Invergarry, Highland, with the specimen now preserved in Inverness.

Major irruptions during the 20th century occurred in 1911, 1933, 1954 and 1968, and in contrast to 1868, the 1968 bird was the sole Scottish representative of a huge irruption – over 300 individuals reached Britain – that commenced in early August and extended into 1969.

1868: Orkney, Sanday, shot, 1 October (Buckley & Harvey-Brown 1891).
1868: Highland, Invergarry, shot, October (*Zoologist* 1868: 1484, 1869: 1519, Gray).
1968: Shetland, Lerwick, 21–23 August (D. Coutts, J. Gray) (*BB* 63: 371; *SB* 5: 290–291).
[**pre-1833 records:** North-East Scotland, 1871 Borders, 1876 Lothian, 1891 Dumfries & Galloway]

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Plate 149. Isabelline Wheatear, East Linton, Lothian, 28 November 2021. © *Sam Northwood*

Isabelline Wheatear at East Linton, 23–29 November 2021 – first record for Lothian

I.J. ANDREWS & A. SINCLAIR

Anne Sinclair was birdwatching at Phantassie, East Linton (Lothian) on 23 November 2021 whilst taking part in our local SOC branch's winter atlas survey. Anne was sure she'd found a wheatear sp. but understandably uncertain which species it was. News to that effect was put out on our atlas WhatsApp group the following morning and I quickly made my way down to tetrad NT57Y to investigate. November wheatears are always worth a second look, even if this one was more than 5 km from the coast. Fortunately, the bird was still in the same freshly ploughed field when I arrived, and it stayed there and in the nearby stubble throughout its seven-day stay. It survived a gale on 26th/27th and snow on the 28th but was last seen on 29 November.

It was immediately apparent that the bird was a pale, sandy-coloured wheatear, but was it a Desert or Isabelline? Although these species have some distinct plumages, I was aware of the difficulties of differentiating some young birds in autumn. So, as well as noting the key features in the field, I was keen to photograph the bird in flight - which was easier said than done. There was much debate amongst the early trickle of visitors, but a good binocular view of the fanned tail and some photos of the underwing, upperwing and tail eventually convinced me that it was an Isabelline Wheatear.

Key plumage features

Upperparts: greyish buff with a brighter, slightly rufous patch above the white rump. The rump showed a broad white rectangle with no hint of buff or pale orange. **Head:** the head pattern was subdued with an indistinct dark eye stripe and an equally indistinct, slightly paler supercilium flaring over the eye. **Tail:** at rest, the tail looked all dark. In flight, when the tail was invariably closed, it also looked to have an all-dark tail. Only on one occasion, when it veered to land, did I see the black T in the tail, with a broad black band and a short leg of the T in the central area. In at least one photo, this T shape

Plate 150. Isabelline Wheatear, East Linton, Lothian, 24 November 2021. This photo illustrates the primary projection. © *Kris Gibb*

is also visible (Plate 150). **Wings:** all the feathers were broadly edged with buff, so the wing looked predominantly pale buff. The characteristic contrasting black alula was visible in photos at rest and in flight (Plates 149 and 151). The primary projection was considerably greater than the tail projection beyond the wing tip (Plate 150) (see van Duivendijk 2010). **Underwing:** all white, including the underwing coverts. **Underparts:** buff, being brighter on the upper breast and fading to white under the tail.

The bird was usually very active, running rapidly backwards and forwards across the field or flying low above it. When stationary, it would dip down and frequently flick its tail up and down. At other times, the tail movement was more of a slow wag. Other people saw it find the occasional worm and leatherjacket (Darren Woodhead pers. comm.) during which time its feeding behaviour was less frenetic.

The literature suggests that ageing such a bird is not straightforward in the field, but the rather uniform nature of the head pattern may indicate that it was a first-calendar-year bird (Shirihai & Svensson 2018).

This is the first Isabelline Wheatear to be seen in Lothian. Of the previous eight Scottish records, only one was on the Scottish mainland (North-East Scotland, 1979) with all the others being recorded on the islands. Lothian has hosted two Desert Wheatears: one at Dunglass/Thorntonloch/Torness on 9–13 November 1997 and another at Musselburgh from 1 December 1997 to 4 January 1998.

This record is subject to acceptance by the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC).

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Plate 151 a–c. Isabelline Wheatear, East Linton, Lothian, 24 November 2021. These photos show the pale upper wing (with contrasting dark alula), rump/tail pattern and white underwing. © *Ian Andrews*

Plate 152. Ross's Goose with Pink-footed Geese, Pitlessie, Fife, 1 March 2022. © *Kris Gibb*

Ross's Goose, Pitlessie, 26 February–1 March 2022 – first record for Fife

S. PINDER

At approximately 10:50 hrs on 26 February 2022 I was driving north on a minor road towards The Wilderness in central Fife. I noticed four geese flying relatively low over the car, three Pink-feet and a 'white goose'. There were few cars on the road so I was able to pull over and got my bins on the bird just as it whiffled into a field out of sight behind a stone wall. Although that view was only for a second or so and from behind, I could see it was white with sharply demarcated black primaries. At least this rules out feral and leucistic geese I thought. Fortunately, behind the bird was a row of black plastic wrapped bails, a useful landmark.

A quick check of Googlemaps and a few false turns and I was able to pull up in a farmyard relatively close to the bails. The farmer was happy for me to park out of the way and have a look for geese.

It quickly became apparent that approximately 500 m to the north of my position there were about 500 Pink-footed Geese sleeping and grazing two fields away. It took me a few minutes to relocate the 'white goose' initially hidden behind a stand of hawthorns at about 11:05 hrs.

Over such range, and seemingly always facing away from me as it grazed, its size wasn't obvious at the outset, although I suspected it to be a Ross's Goose and more specifically the one that had departed Clyde some ten days earlier.

I recorded some digiscoped video and eventually it turned side on. It was obviously a Snow or a Ross's goose, but its diminutive size still wasn't apparent. Neither the bill shape nor the colour could be readily seen at this distance. Structurally it looked compact and the head seemed rounded. I phoned Paul French explaining I thought I had a Ross's Goose and hoping he'd be able to help me out with any features required to separate Ross's and Snow Geese at this range. Armed with a bit more knowledge, I continued to watch the bird

when it and some of the flock took flight, landing much closer to bathe in muddy flooded corner of the nearer field. As soon as the bird took flight its identification was straightforward. It looked at least 25% smaller than the accompanying Pink-feet.

Now closer, features could more readily discerned; the small, conical bill and the lack of 'grin-patch'. The bill was reddish with a purple base. After approximately five minutes the bird took off again with some of the Pink-foot flock and returned to the field it was previously feeding in. I messaged out the news to the local Fife WhatsApp group and to BirdGuides via Twitter. The whole flock flew west at 12:35 hrs just as the first birders arrived in the vicinity. It was fairly quickly re-found by John Nadin in fields near Freuchie. It remained in the area for four days until 1 March in fields between Freuchie and The Wilderness.

Description

Small, compact goose. In flight approximately 75% the size of a Pink-footed Goose. At reasonable distance its small-size could easily be discerned alongside Pink-feet when alert. Plumage entirely white except black primaries (I didn't note any black or grey on the greater coverts). A single dark secondary on the right wing can be seen in photographs of the bird, although I didn't notice this in the field. Rounded head crown and short neck. Short, conical bill, with no 'grin-patch'. Base of upper mandible more-or-less straight or very slightly concave. Red-pink bill with purple base and pale nail. Red-pink legs.

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Ross's Goose status in Britain

To quote the British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee (BOURC) announcement of 29 November 2021: *"Ross's Goose had been placed in Category D of the British List for many years, as there have been uncertainties about the origins of birds found in Britain because the species is kept widely in captivity and escapes are known to occur. However, the species is a long-distance migrant in North America and there is much precedent for Nearctic wildfowl, including geese, to cross the Atlantic naturally and be found in Europe. Furthermore, the very significant growth and expansion of the population of Ross's Goose since the 1950s has increased the probability of such trans-Atlantic vagrancy.*

Part of the BOURC remit and procedure is to periodically re-examine species in Category D. Following published BOURC guidelines created to judge the status of wildfowl (British Birds 113: 46–53), BOURC considered a number of records of Ross's Geese. Following these criteria, a record of an adult at Plex Moss, Lancashire, 5 December 1970 to 17 January 1971 and consecutive winters to January 1974 was found by the majority of BOURC (7:1) to be eligible for Category A. This record occurred during a period of rapid population growth of the species, and in circumstances highly suggestive of wild origin.

Ross's Goose breeds in northern Canada and migrates to winter in southern and western USA and northern Mexico. A significant and dramatic increase in the population has occurred since the 1950s, an estimated 8900% over the past 40 years, with the species now classified as Least Concern by IUCN."

For more details on this recent addition to the British List, see www.bou.org.uk/british-list/changes-29-november-2021/

Given this background, the individual that toured Scotland in winter 2021/22 undoubtedly received more attention than it would have done previously. During this time, it was noted in a total of six different recording areas, although there are some surprisingly long gaps between sightings. A summary is given below:

Angus & Dundee: Montrose Basin, 20–23 October 2021. **Ayrshire:** Fail, 4–8 November 2021. **Ayrshire:** Hunterston, 28 November–17 December 2021. **Clyde:** north side Glasgow/Milngavie area, 24 January–15 February 2022. **Fife:** Pitlessie area, 26 February–1 March 2022. **North-East Scotland:** Portlethen area, 5–6 March, then 10–15 March, and again 22–25 March 2022. **Caithness:** Flying over Lieurary, 27 March 2022.

All records are subject to acceptance by the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC).

Advice to contributors

There is a basic division in *Scottish Birds* between papers and short notes that are peer-reviewed followed by the Club and Birding sections which are not. These splits in content are highlighted by fonts used and paper colour.

The first part accepts manuscripts on the status, distribution and populations of birds in Scotland and, particularly, changes in these over time. Write-ups of census work find a natural home in this section, as do the culmination of research topics and updates to information in *The Birds of Scotland* (Forrester *et al.* 2007). Original work and observations are encouraged, but summary papers will be considered and key-note papers of a more general nature may occasionally be commissioned. Papers should be fully referenced as in any scientific work. House style should be followed and guidance is available on the SOC website. Articles of less than 700 words are generally considered as short notes, but are otherwise in a similar format.

Authors should bear in mind that only a small proportion of the *Scottish Birds* readership are scientists and should aim to present their material concisely, interestingly and clearly. Unfamiliar technical terms and symbols should be avoided wherever possible and, if deemed essential, should be explained. Supporting statistics should be kept to a minimum. All papers and short notes are accepted on the understanding that they have not been offered for publication elsewhere and that they will be subject to editing. Papers will be acknowledged on receipt and are normally reviewed by at least two members of the editorial panel and, in most cases, also by an independent referee. They will normally be published in order of acceptance of fully revised manuscripts.

The latter two sections of *Scottish Birds* welcome informal as well as more serious contributions about any aspect of birds and their habitats in Scotland. It is not peer-reviewed, has minimal editing, and contributions can be descriptive, anecdotal, controversial, humorous or quirky. They can report on surveys, express opinions, describe birds and places, look back into history, speculate as to the future and can represent organisations or be the work of private individuals. The documentation of rare and scarce birds in Scotland, plus a wide range of identification, site and species related information is lavishly illustrated by high quality colour photographs. We welcome photographs, maps, cartoons, and will accept basic graphs and tables when relevant. Meeting reports or field trip accounts are all welcome, but our main aim is to focus on Scottish birds in Scotland or abroad. We will occasionally include articles from other parts of the world and sometimes about other wildlife.

In terms of length, we accept anything from short notes up to articles of *c.* 2,000 words. There are no strict guidelines as to format, but we would encourage contributors to follow the house style (see SOC website for guidance, as detailed above). Within this section, we also publish obituaries of Club members and others who have contributed to Scottish ornithology. These are organised through Waterston House, where the Club Administrator will liaise with contributors. Book reviews are organised through the Club Librarian.

Please submit articles! We very much wish to encourage unsolicited contributions to this part of *Scottish Birds*. The editors spend much time requesting articles - a task that would be far less onerous if they are submitted freely from members and other readers. We wish to make it as easy as possible for contributors to send us material that reflects the enormous range of news, work and opinion relevant to Scotland's birds.

Text, image and graphics formats

Contributions should preferably be submitted in electronic format via email. Only short articles and letters can be accepted in printed or hand written form. No fees are paid. Tables, maps and diagrams should be designed to fit either a single column or the full page width. Table and photograph captions should be self-explanatory and should be able to stand alone from the text. Please include all captions after the text. For photographs please supply the locality and month/year taken (if known), together with the name of the photographer.

Maps should preferably be provided in pdf format, or as a high-resolution jpg/tiff file. Maps may be redrawn to maintain house style, in which case the data used in their compilation may be requested. Charts should be provided with their accompanying data within a stand-alone spreadsheet so that house style can be applied. Photographs should be supplied as direct copies of the original (un-altered and un-cropped) camera files.

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Please send all correspondence to: SOC Club Administrator at Waterston House, Aberlady EH32 0PY or to mail@the-soc.org.uk Telephone: 01875 871330 or email for further advice and assistance.

PhotoSPOT

Plate 153. I had been sitting on the rocks on the top of Gullane Point, East Lothian, for a while before I noticed a raptor sitting motionless further along at the end of the point - about 25 m from me. I decided that it was either very sick or was focusing intently on something, so I approached quietly and I managed to get to within 3 m of her - recognising the bird was in fact a female Sparrowhawk.

She was peering intently over the edge of the rocks, at the shoreline some twenty feet below, towards some Oystercatchers and a Turnstone. Suddenly, she launched… I thought she had seen me but as I watched she stooped towards the Turnstone which had taken flight. After knocking it into the sea she promptly dived down, and with a huge splash, retrieved the hapless Turnstone – which had sunk below the waves – before flying back to where I had been sitting ten minutes previously. The Turnstone was still struggling, so she was reluctant to fly off but eventually she did fly over to the next headland, then off into the buckthorn thickets.

As this event unfolded in front of me, I had managed to grab the camera from my rucksack - the settings were rather random and the focus point was way off-centre - however, I was lucky to capture three decent images amongst the many blurred frames.

Equipment used
Nikon Z6 camera, Nikon 300mm f4 PF lens (with 1.4x converter), 1/3200 second, ISO 2000, f7.1.

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